MOSES

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MOSES

MOSES

A NOVEL

BY LOUIS UNTERMEYER

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A PROLOG

A PROLOG

1

Thermutis readjusted the wooden head-rest for the seventh time and repeated, with worn determination, Hathor's hymn to sleep. But to no end. She remained hopelessly wide awake. Daughter of the greatest of Pharaohs, Thermutis "the imperturbable" was confused. Night gave her uncertainties wilder distortions; sleeplessness made them doubly unreal. But what was real? What could she hold fast? What could she dismiss? The pain? It was always most treacherous when fought with. The past? She could not focus blurring memory upon it. She found herself dodging among evasions, half escaping in fantasies. No. That was not the way out. She must think; she must lie quiet; she must remember. The pictures steadied themselves again . . .

It was the tiled court in the palace. She remembered gazing with abstracted fixity at the chain of amulets worn by her brother Amenophis the Third while a deputation from Nubia presented him with ebony, ivory, odorous gums, dove-gray cattle and ox-eyed slaves. She wondered whether his unshifting gaze meant he was bored as she, or

whether, for the benefit of subject states, he was playing the god from whom he was supposed to be descended. The Nubian spokesman finished, kissed the ground at the king's feet and remained prostrate while an Egyptian priest began an answering oration. The speech combined a celebration of the ruler's magnificence, the thanks of Amen-Ra (by which the audience understood that most of the gifts would be appropriated by the temple) and a detailed summary of what would be expected at precisely this time next year.

Amenophis sat unblinking. His scepter, the symbolic pastoral crook, was dead gold in his right hand; the bronze-shafted flail and his left hand seemed cast from the same ingot. Thermutis drowsed. The delegation from Punt was before them now. Its leader, cannier than most diplomats, shielded his eyes with both hands, as though blinded by the refulgence of his majesty. He affirmed his country's loyalty to Egypt ever since the days of Hatshepset (may she rest eternally in Amen-Ra), suggested a more reciprocal treaty in the matter of cedar for cotton, drew attention to the superiority of Puntic myrrh, and prayed that, meanwhile, the sun-incarnated Pharaoh would accept this paltry collection of dog-headed apes, raw gold, boxes of ointments, precious woods, ivory wands, stone-set boomerangs, skins of rare animals, dyed cloths, a tamed tiger-cub, two white monkeys . . .

The lesser priest was speaking again . . . The blurring continued, ceased. Thermutis, roused by new voices, jerked her head high. This was an aggregation of Hebrews drab among the brilliantly frescoed columns. She had missed the first part of the address, but now she heard that there was "little to offer but copper from the mines

of Sinai and, less easily broken than trinkets, an integrity of purpose."

The inflection even more than the words made her look at the speaker. What she saw first was the contradiction of his bearing. His back was bent at the proper court angle, but his eyes were as direct as those into which he looked. It was not exactly arrogance, but it was something more than self-possession which stiffened his words. He continued to talk deliberately, with phrases unsweetened by humility. Thermutis, who regarded all subjects with the same unconcern she gave their tributes, suddenly realized she must cease looking at him.

He was young; about twenty-three, she thought; young for a man, not for a woman in a country where all girls married before fifteen. All, that is, except spinsters or a misguided princess who in her advanced twenties had dedicated her futile chastity to Isis . . . The young Hebrew was ending what was neither an offer nor a plea, but somehow managed to be both. He and his companions from Horeb wished to join their fellows of the tribe of Leah and settle in Egypt.

For the first time Amenophis spoke. "Were they trained in soldiery?" The young Hebrew replied that, while untrained . . . "Expert in snaring, fowling and hunting?" interrupted Amenophis. The negative was more direct. "Then," announced the king, "we need not consider your request, since we require as new subjects only those ready with the bow or skilled in the chase."

At that moment, Thermutis remembered, Queen Ti looked up and, as though unconscious of the last sentences, told the spokesman he would be granted a final hearing the following day. The audience was over. Thermutis sat won-

dering whether those young shoulders were always so proud or whether they seemed especially straight as they left the hall. . . .

The pictures began to leap from the dark and roll by, gathering speed.Thermutis saw each detail of the supper with unusual sharpness. She had not noticed at the time, but now she recollected how obviously Amenophis had failed to hide his indecision by blustering about the growing foreign element, misquoting the proverb that "land lay uneasy under easy landlords," and taking refuge in alternate cups of date wine and honey cordial.

"Please don't quibble," Queen Ti had said, "and please remember that, though wars and bull-baiting may be pleasant and sufficient diversions for a restless monarch, the people of Egypt take less whole-hearted pleasure in them. Besides, your exploits as lion-hunter and arbiter of world-politics, splendid though they may appear when chiseled on the tomb at Thebes . . ."

"My dear," protested Amenophis.

"All of which means that we need workmen far more than warriors. As I have reminded you oftener than even a wife should, there is the forecourt of the temple at Luxor which you have promised to begin a dozen times. There is your colossal statue from the single block lying at Karnak, as innocent of the mallet as the day it came from the quarries. There is the half-completed tabernacle begun, you may have forgotten, as a thank-offering for your victories in Abhat. I say nothing of your own funerary temple and its lesser buildings at—"

"Of course," temporized Amenophis, "if you really think—"

"Nor will delicacy allow me to mention the excavation

of the lake which is to celebrate our twenty-fifth anniversary, and which, if it is ever to be begun—"

"My dear wife and co-ruler," said Amenophis, never so awkward as when in retreat, "you are quite right and—er—more than right. So let us say no more about it. The Hebrews shall be added to your lazy but, alas, always hungry army of laborers; your pet sculptors shall have a few thousand extra hands to spoil; and the newcomers—"

"Shall be tax-paying serfs," concluded Ti, wiping her hands on the thin round bread-cakes that served for napkins and rising from the table as Amenophis went back to his mulberries. . . .

Thermutis had reason to remember the next day. The night of the reception she had dreamed she was sacrificing to Ra when, as if in acceptance of her prayers, the stone image of the god opened its arms to her—and its eyes were the eyes of the young Hebrew. It seemed part of the dream that Amenophis and Ti should have gone to inspect a site for a new obelisk and that she should be the one member of the royal family at the conference. The delegates and priests had compromised their differences when Thermutis spoke to the official scribe, "Tell the young Hebrew I have a message for him from the Queen."

After that hour memory refused to focus. Thermutis recalled moments only, flashes of unbearable tension, little or no conversation. It was mind against mind; spirit joined with struggling spirit. Amram's contradiction of youth and dark reserve intensified her new-found impetuosity. Rebellion gave way to recklessness; pride was lost in a headlong need to give and be possessed. Furtive, seemingly accidental meetings in the overgrown garden behind the palace . . . Their first moonlit evening on the Nile

when, disguised as a harp-player, she had unveiled herself . . . The sight of his vibrant body so luxuriously relaxed; his heavy head lying on her strangely quiet breast . . . The night in the deserted pavilion when she had cried in a mystical ecstasy, "We do not choose; we are chosen!"

Where was that exaltation now? Where that slow burning by day and the sudden blaze by night? Only cold nights now and colder fear . . . Servants' gossip of a riot in the Hebrew quarter speedily quelled and immediately forgotten. A few deaths; a dozen exiles. Waiting. Slow stabbing fear. Silence. No one to ask, nothing to learn, nowhere to run. No answer. And Amram, whom she had felt as an ever-flaming sword, a constant pillar of fire, extinguished. Days of gradual dying. Then, when the last extremity had been plumbed, days of gathering life. Life beginning about her, life fumbling within her. Anger first. What was this intrusion? Her business was not with living but with death. What was this fresh demand upon her? She would die before she gave birth to it. Then new fears, strangely mixed with shame. Weak determination, twisted dreams. A Pharaoh's daughter and a Pharaoh's sister could never have been the lover of a slave. It was too monstrous. Madness. Then contrition. She had done it. She had sinned against her blood, against her vows. But surely the gods were not so cruel as to permit this unspeakable motherhood. They would take it away. They would remove the guilt. Then Amram's face would rise in the night and her remembering loins would throb unbearably. Renewed agonies of love. Entreaties to Isis; appeals to Osiris; nightlong prayers to Ra-Horakhti. Only let it live; only let me bear it; and if it is a boy he shall be dedicated to

the temple. He was conceived in darkness and of a dark father, but he shall serve the sun-god and worship in light. Only let him live . . . Then fear again. The months ahead, the daily dizziness, the growing burden. No, she could not face the final hour alone. She needed help, advice; above all, assurance. She must tell some one. A woman. The woman. Ti. Not Ti the queen, but Ti the mother . . .

The pain dwindled, mixed with her breathing, sank. Thermutis slept.

2

Thermutis stopped pacing the Queen's bedroom and sank down beside Ti. Never a tall girl, she seemed to shrink, to fold in upon herself, until her sister-in-law stood like a high column above her. There was scarcely five years' difference in their ages, but Thermutis, waiting for the older woman to speak, looked like a lost and badly frightened child.

"But, my dear girl, why didn't you tell me before?" inquired Ti, ceasing to look at her bracelets. "But never mind; let us examine the future, not prod the past. Go on."

"Go on? How? What am I going to do?"

"What do you want to do?"

"Honor the gods; obey their commands; bear my burden."

"We'll talk about the gods later. As to the child, of course you shall have it; and without any more to-do than is usually accorded the mother of a miracle."

"The mother of—a miracle?"

"Certainly, my dear innocent. It is an uncommon but

not unprecedented occurrence in the royal house of Egypt. I, myself, am an Asiatic, and we foreigners, unlike your poor Amram, do well not to inquire too closely concerning the nocturnal diversions of the gods. Nevertheless, we must respect history. It is a matter of record that Hatshepset claimed she was the incarnation of Amen-Ra who had begotten her in the seclusion of his sanctuary and that only her mother was mortal. Even your own brother who, to my narrow conjugal eye, seems compounded chiefly of flesh and blood, delights to explain how Amen assumed the shape of Amenophis' father so that his divine ancestry should be doubly assured."

"But how—?"

"Nothing could be more appropriate, my dear Thermutis. You have been visited by the gods—or, rather, by a god. Let us decide on one of them. I think you mentioned Ra-Horakhti, a very agreeable variation of the not so popular Amen. Very well. The child will have an auspicious introduction to the world. It will command a dual reverence: divinity on one side, royalty on the other. If it is a girl we will leave her in the temple awhile. If it is a boy, he will be a younger brother or, to be more exact, an indeterminate cousin to my own little Amenophis. I shall insist, of course, on being his godmother."

"But have you thought—?"

"As to ways and means, my anxious one, these will be shaped when the time nears. At present I should imagine it would be best to have the infant 'discovered' by its divinely appointed mother. After the child is safely delivered, pinched and swaddled, I would suggest placing him on the steps of Ra-Horakhti's local temple on the Nile. Better still, leave him in the Nile."

"*In* the Nile?" gasped Thermutis.

"Why not? Don't you remember the old wives' prediction about a virgin and a watery birth? Of course, the baby need not be totally immersed. I'll have one of the eunuchs make a basket or an ark of bulrushes, daub it with pitch, line it with clay, and put the sun disc, the royal amulets and the quill of Thoth among the wrappings. Thus every one will know he is a prince, a truth-telling scribe, a prophet chosen of the god. Afterwards, as its earthly mother, you will officially adopt the heavenly offspring."

"But the people?"

"The people have not enjoyed a miracle," rejoined Ti with a suspicion of a smile, "since your brother came back from the Nubian conquest to find himself a father. There will be a public holiday; there will be free cakes and beer; there will be gifts to the priests. The child will have the good wishes of all. And if it is a boy—"

"Oh, it *will* be a boy. I feel it; I know it."

"Well, let us concede the issue. The Nile will receive him; and, while the priests stand about chanting, you will draw him splendidly out of the water. And so—"

"What else?"

"We will call him Moses."

BOOK ONE

"And she called his name Moses"

TWO PRINCES

1

THE child Moses staggered gravely over the floor of the royal nursery, carrying his eighteen months on treacherous feet. He was imitating little Amenophis, two years his senior, with fair success, but he could not understand how 'Nophis managed to reach the other side so quickly. The other side was the particular goal; it was the children's inexhaustible hunting-ground. Most of the nursery floor was covered with tiles painted to represent reeds and lotuses, but in the corners the jungle suddenly grew rich and fantastic. Here against a background of ferns, savagely glazed lions prowled; wild cattle continually raised faintly surprised heads; rainbow-colored fish swam in the same precise circle; ducks and pigeons strained toward an enameled sky in arrested flight. The boys' skill was fabulous; they never missed their quarry.

"It's my turn to have the spear," said the young heir to the throne, "and you can have the bow."

"Don't want a bow," firmly announced the younger prince, "want a spear."

"But I'm tired of shooting birds," complained his

cousin, "I've caught thirty-seven ducks already. I want to fight another lion."

"Want to fight another lion," stolidly repeated Moses, keeping a fat fist around the desired weapon.

Little Amenophis looked hurt, but not helpless. He had hoped that Moses would follow his logic, to say nothing of the rules of the game. But since the younger huntsman had not yet reached the age of reason, the rightful claimant saw he must descend to the level of force and appropriate what was manifestly his. No one could have been more surprised at receiving the (fortunately blunted) spear in the pit of his stomach than the heir apparent—no one except his father who, accompanied by Queen Ti, was showing the Mitannian envoys through the palace.

"Moses," commanded the Pharaoh, "Moses, I am ashamed to see— But," turning to the others, "I regret bringing your attention to such warlike scenes. My children, sirs. This, nobles, is my son and heir; this, the god-begotten child of my sister who was gathered to the divine bosom shortly after giving birth to her son. Come forward, 'Nophis. Come, Moses."

Little Amenophis, well versed in the required demeanor, made the sign of the rising Nile and recited, "May the gods of upper and lower Egypt attend your coming in by night and your going forth by day."

Moses, who had acquired court etiquette more recently, forgot everything except the shining thing which his royal uncle was wearing. It was a new crown: a gold fillet ending in a glittering bow. Never had there been such a toy. Lapis lazuli, carnelian and turquoise rainbowed about it; over all, as though in mid-air, a sun disc was radiantly poised. Moses heard nothing else, saw nothing else. He

dropped the spear and, as the beaming Pharaoh picked him up, reached out both hands. With the swiftness of childish purpose, he took the crown from the royal head and placed it on his own. It fell over his neck and rested on the small shoulders.

"Sacrilege! Sacrilege!" cried the attendants, while the Mitannian envoys looked apprehensively toward the windows.

"Nonsense," laughed Ti, restoring the diadem to its former eminence. "What less can you expect when you so dazzle a baby? Possession, according to the proverb-makers, is the sincerest form of tribute."

"It isn't exactly sacrilege," admitted Amenophis, "but it isn't nonsense either. It was the new crown, you know—and the first time I wore it too. I think," he added half fearfully, half wistfully, "we'll have to consult the wise men."

"Oh, your soothsayers!" mocked Ti. "If I hadn't more wisdom in my fingernail than those stuffed heads, I would cease imposing taxes and start predicting the weather. But have your way. Their speeches seldom fail to be amusing."

"My dear," cautioned her husband, "they are holy. And even if I do not always understand their poetry, I hope," he concluded with lame dignity, "I am not too dull to profit by them. We will hear them—"

"This evening, after our guests from Mitanni have found more suitable entertainment," said Ti suavely, as they withdrew. Moses and 'Nophis, forgetting their differences, began to stalk a painted bullock.

The evening dragged itself along like a wounded crocodile. Interminable prayers, sacrifices, exhortations.

Finally, after the last cup of wine had been spilled on the altar and the entrails of the fish distributed in the prescribed manner, Bialim, oldest of the incantors, arose to interpret the signs.

"The smoke," declaimed Bialim, the soft accents rising strangely from cruelly curved lips, "veers toward the east but drifts away to Him Who Waits in Darkness. Likewise the flesh offered in the name of the King is quickly consumed, while the food of the child burns slowly. Set and Seker are pleased, but Hapi grieves and Ptah is not propitious. In the smoke there is revealed to me the vision of a strange people and a stranger god. It is a treacherous folk where brothers deal traitorously with one another, conquer by deception, and trick their god with flattery. An alien people, they make the land their own and leave it despoiled. Their bloodthirsty god comes into Egypt and possesses it. His name cannot be uttered, but it is hateful to Amen. He—"

"But what has all this to do with the child?" Ti inquired wearily.

"The image of the child," replied Bialim, perturbed at being cheated of his peroration, "mingles in the smoke with the new god. My eyes are unhappy to observe it, my tongue loath to declare it. But it is so. Moreover, the infant was not only strengthened by demons to lift the crown from the royal head but he was emboldened to place it on his own. Had not Amen's shadow intervened, the young heir would certainly have been slain by the point of a murderous spear. Examined separately, the two acts have the gravest significance; read together, the conclusion is inescapable. It is, however, the gods who speak; I only translate for them."

"And Amen suggests—?" asked Ti in her most casual key.

"Amen directs," replied Bialim, in a still suaver voice while his lips thinned to a sharp line, "that, to safeguard the royal line and as a token of surrender, the young prince Moses be removed from the palace and be placed under the tutelage of Amen's priests."

"Amen—and his priesthood," spoke another voice, "have been waiting long for such an augury and evidently do not purpose to waste it." Ti's smile was unobserved, but her delight in religious wrangles was proverbial. She looked at the challenger, a priest of a rival order, and approved of the straight eyes, the quiet mouth and the chin cut out like a boomerang.

"You forget—" frowned Bialim.

"You also forget, august prognosticator," interrupted his opponent, with a smile that went no further than his eyes, "you forget that the child Moses was promised to us of Ra-Horakhti. It is true we are not as proud nor as established a priesthood as that of Amen, but it requires time to substitute simplicity for superstitions. Yet we of Ra-Horakhti increase, though our sale of dispensations is neither as large nor profitable as Amen's, and even though we do not enjoy a monopoly in burials."

"You must admit that was very neat," murmured Ti as Amenophis looked puzzled and Bialim's anger cut through his liturgical tone.

"I have heard your dissenting opinions often enough," he glowered. "Reports of your 'new' ideas come through our weavers and carpenters. You have even tried to break the solidarity of our stonecutters, influencing some of the younger men with precious twaddle about a return to the

primitive or some other heretical absurdity. But let me tell you that the traditions which our ancestors upheld will outlast your son's grandsons. Nor will you tamper with them unharmed—or unperceived. We know your intentions. First you would have the people forget tradition, then alter the ritual, then demolish the Law. But I tell you sacrilege is sacrilege even when it masquerades under the shabby cloak of art."

"But, your holinesses," interrupted Amenophis, an anxious quaver proceeding oddly from his thick-set gravity, "is this—er—necessary? Aren't we being carried away from the matter in question?"

"How could you!" reproached Ti. "And just when we were being made privy to holy schisms and concepts of style among the immortals! But what does Bialim say?"

"The child—and the court—will be safer in the all-encompassing, all-protective benevolence of Amen," maintained Bialim, resuming the impersonal inflection.

"The child belongs to no one yet, no one except his godparents," responded Ti. "The gods must choose him more definitely. Better still, he himself will choose when the time comes. In the meanwhile, the night is growing cool and I must protect the remnants of my voice. The king, I believe, hunts early tomorrow. May you all drink from the untroubled wells of sleep." There was an uncomfortable pause.

"I think she is right," said Amenophis, and followed her.

2

The two boys were swimming in the forbidden Nile three miles from the palace.

"Like it better than the royal pool, 'Nophis?" inquired

the younger, whose head seemed to have grown out of proportion to his frame.

"I should say so," spluttered the other, kicking free of a tangle of lily-roots. "No fun in a place with a lot of slaves looking on, ready to dive in if you stay under longer than they can count ten. And it's so nasty and clean. Never a crocodile to yell at, not even a fish."

"I caught one with a branched stick I made the other day."

"What of it? I caught three last week with my hands. They were big ones, too. Big as this—look!"

"You're older than I am."

"Only two years. And you're just as far as I am in our studies. Didn't old Daku say your spelling was better than mine and your papyrus much neater?"

"But he said your words were better chosen and your history stuff much more exact, didn't he?"

"Sure. He had to say it. What would *you* say, Moses, if your pupil was the Pharaoh's son?"

"That's right. . . . Isn't the water great today!"

"Great! Hope nobody sees us."

For a while there was no conversation but gurgles, shouts and answering splashes. Then, as they sunned themselves on a rock,

"What are you going to be when you grow up, 'Nophis?"

"Pharaoh, of course. What did you think?"

"Of course. That's what you're going to *be*. But what are you going to *do?*"

"Oh, astronomy, maybe. I'd like to know more about the stars. Maybe I'd discover some new ones. Give 'em names. Make up new groups. Ever think, Moses, some of them may be inhabited, full of queer animals and different

sorts of human beings? Plants higher than palm-trees. Men with two heads or three legs, maybe. Did you ever think how it would be to live on a shooting-star? Ever wonder what the earth looks like from the moon?"

"I'm going to be a scribe," announced Moses, "or a conqueror. Sometimes I like writing best. It's fun putting marks on papyrus and watching them grow into words. And the sentences get to be *things*. Things you can say, afterwards; things you can see."

"But a conqueror doesn't bother much with words," objected the other.

"Well, that's the queer part," replied Moses. "I'd like to make words that live and run and grow tall. Sometimes I see them like people, people waiting, ready to obey, ready to take up arms and follow cheering. You know, it would be great to feel you were a leader—I don't mean just a prince every one has to bow to—but a man who could direct people fighting, praying, winning territory because of the words he made up."

"It sounds pretty difficult, and you'd have to work hard all the time thinking up new ideas. Anyway," he droned like a tabulator, "first we'll have to finish the Seven Books of Numbers, and the Lives of the One Hundred and Fifty-six Pharaohs, and the dates of the dynasties, and Selected Passages from the Books of the Dead, and the Sixteen Rhythms, and the Spirit Hymns, and—" Here 'Nophis yawned and sat up to get a sharper view of a brightly decorated barge which had just swung around the bend.

"Looks like some one from the court. It is! Bet I'll beat you to the other bank."

"All right. Ready?"

"Go!"

They reached the palace intercepted by no one to ask why they were out of breath.

3

THE ROYAL bed-chamber had never housed a more perturbed Pharaoh. Ti had never been more patient.

"Well, my dear," said Amenophis after he had tossed himself wide awake, "if you want to know, I'm worried. I try not to think about it, but that only makes it worse. And it's no good talking."

"Oh, but it is," assured Ti, slipping on a loose-sleeved wrap in preparation for the midnight dialogs which of late had been growing more frequent. "By all means say what keeps that brain of yours so unseasonably active. Come, let's talk."

Amenophis grumbled, but the wifely ear detected the note of relief. "It's pretty mixed, but even the confused parts have a relation to each other. And what with Syria on my mind, and little 'Nophis not as little as he used to be, and the queer pain in my back, and the old priesthood always at me to take a definite stand, and the succession and—"

"Suppose," said Ti quietly, "we separate these tangled threads and examine them one at a time. Let's take the most twisted first. What is there about the priesthood that should trouble you more than usual?"

"It's Bialim chiefly, and the whole Amen party in general. Bialim says there's a dangerous tendency on foot and that nowadays there's too much radicalism and religious speculation. He says it's undermining the social life and spreading even to the highest circles. Of course," Amenophis declaimed it like a lesson, "what it

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comes down to is the old quarrel between the Amen-Ra and the Ra-Horakhti faction. Each claims that it alone is the true representative of the Sun and that the only thing the two have in common is Ra, the syllable, not—so Bialim insists—Ra, the essence of the god."

"And what does Bialim desire you to do?" asked Ti with foreboding gravity.

"Oh, he would like me to come out with an obelisk or a stela or something proclaiming that the supremacy of Amen-Ra must be unchallenged, that the ancient conventions be upheld to the letter, and that all other forms and manifestations—meaning Ra-Horakhti—are only lesser aspects of Ra."

"You will, of course, do nothing of the kind," said Ti. "You are too far-seeing to let Bialim dangle wool before your eyes, knowing it is his last effort to maintain power. And *he* knows it. The Amen priests have taxed the people unmercifully and curtailed their liberties. They are much less popular than they used to be, while the growing cult of Ra-Horakhti allows not only freedom of thought but free criticism. I have been thinking for some years that the people of Egypt would welcome a change in religion."

"But what way—?"

"We are not quite ready for that yet," calmed Ti. "Tell me your thoughts about the other matters."

Thoughts were not Amenophis' specialty. Thoughts were what he suspected in others and distrusted in himself. Had it been a tiger-hunt that Ti was asking him to describe, he would have marshaled every detail in its most effective order. But thoughts—! Still, it was good to get some of this confusion clear. Ti was a great help, no

doubt of that, and it was easier to talk in the dark. Amenophis stretched by way of prolog.

"I suppose it all comes down to my beginning to feel—well, not old exactly, but uneasy. You know how my back has been for the last two years and lately it seems to be spreading across the chest. Sometimes I can feel it in my wrists. Especially in damp weather." Ti nodded sympathetically. "That idol of Istar—you know the miracle-working one from the King of Mitanni—doesn't seem to have done me any good. It's worse, if anything. I'm getting on, Ti."

"Nonsense. Your eye is as keen and your shots are as accurate as ever. That bull you brought down yesterday—"

"I know. But I'm not myself. And I don't like the way 'Nophis is looking. It's 'Nophis I'm really worried about. That fit he had the other day. And all the poetry he made up about God being One and All. Some of it sounded pretty heretical to me. I want to see him settled and normal. He ought to be married."

" 'Nophis is scarcely thirteen," said Ti.

"Even so. I was little more than twelve when I married and it made a man of me."

"You were different. 'Nophis is such a boy; he's such a dreamer."

"All the more reason he were married. He and Moses do nothing but talk all day and bury themselves in rolls of theology. It isn't healthy—all this reading and writing. Not for a Pharaoh. And that's what 'Nophis will be soon."

"I won't have you talk in that absurdly gloomy tone," rallied Ti. "But I think we can do one or two things to ease your mind on several points. First, the priesthood. I

imagine the time has come for the court to ally itself with the new party. Moses, you know, is dedicated to it and it would not be a bad idea if both boys were to be initiated as high-priests. This would please the common people who worship the youngsters and the new god with equal fervor. At the same time you make a strong bid for Syria, since its sun-worshipers will be quick to identify Ra-Horakhti, under a change of name, with the ruling deity there. An Egypto-Syrian Empire, with a common religion, may be more than a dream, after all."

"And my other dream?" urged Amenophis.

"You have always said Ay was the best of your councilors. He has a daughter about eleven. She is a charming girl, accomplished, healthy, lovely to look at, even though her neck is too long. She is exactly what 'Nophis will like and, possibly, need. I have had my eye on Nefertiti since she was a baby."

Amenophis agreed with a large and comfortable yawn and turned over. Ti remained awake until dawn.

4

Six months later the chief physician, leaving the Pharaoh's bed-chamber, encountered Bialim.

"He rests well tonight. But if he rises for the hunt tomorrow, he will not hunt again."

The priest replied, "Amen-Ra is patient. When the King dies, Amen-Ra will resume his rightful sovereignty."

"There will still be a Pharaoh, Bialim."

"A child! A boy too lost in his studies to be anything more than confused by dialectics. A prince playing at priest!"

"But the Queen?"

Bialim cut the question with a crooked laugh.

"A woman—a clever manipulator and, at times, a shrewd politician—but, nevertheless, a woman. Besides," he added with a sneer, "no one concerned with art-reform will interfere seriously in matters of state. Not when Amen-Ra has reorganized them."

"You are sanguine, Bialim."

"Better than sanguine, my friend, prepared."

. . . . . .

In another part of the palace, Moses put down his whitewashed boards, scrawled over with the day's assignment in magic and astrology, and turned to his fellow-student.

" 'Nophis, what did you think of the talk of that magician?"

The other looked up from his calculations. "The one from Oan?" he inquired, tugging at the single lock of his shaved head. "I haven't made up my mind. Some of the things he claimed were nothing but old-fashioned mumbo-jumbo; but every now and then he said a sentence—" The boy's words trailed off with his thoughts.

"Yes," went on Moses. "That's just how I felt. Of course the idea of the blessed living forever on the 'wine of life' which is both the symbol of the blood of Osiris and the god himself is just elementary metaphysics. Ay says so."

"Like the transformation of the funeral food into the body of the god," smiled 'Nophis, chewing his stalk of sugar-cane, "when the proper spells are pronounced."

"By the properly paid official," supplemented Moses with an irreverent grin. "But what I am thinking of went

far beyond that. Where he made his greatest point was when he poked fun at the struggle going on among our gods. Remember? He called it the 'everlasting duel of dualism.' "

"I remember. I was surprised when I thought how *we* were trying to say the same thing last week. This absurd conflict that asks us to believe in a balanced division of good and evil forces! Half the time Osiris is triumphing over Set; half the time Set has Osiris in his power. But if evil were victorious even for a moment, it would exterminate good forever, wouldn't it?"

"Unless," said Moses, his young face furrowed, "there were some obscure reason for keeping the struggle going. Testing the gods' strength, and our own powers, perhaps. A sort of trial by persistence."

"I can't believe it, Moses. Suffering is something that has no place among the gods. Continual conflict is not good—and if the gods are anything but good they do not deserve our worship. What is more ridiculous than the spectacle of our priests threatening the gods with penalties if the heavenly ones refuse to help destroy our enemies? There are too many of them, anyway."

"Priests or gods, 'Nophis?"

"Both. I tell you, Moses, the more I hear of these things, the deeper I want to go. Changes are coming; and I'd rather understand them and help get them understood than own all Assyria. Wouldn't you?"

"I don't know. I love to know about such things; I dream about them sometimes. But to be the Pharaoh . . ." The boy's eyes burned.

"Well, why not be it, Moses? Next to me, you're the only one with the right to it, and every one knows I don't

want to spend my life making wars and collecting taxes. You'd do it much better, anyway—you always said you wanted to be a leader. And while you were battling with the Hittites, I'd be having a much more exciting fight with the priesthoods. Or let's be co-rulers, like father and mother. We'd both be happy that way. I'd make the laws and you'd see they were enforced. We'd work it all out together. Think of what we could accomplish, Moses, talking everything over. We'd have wise men from every part of the world; voyagers who had seen strange things in strange countries, prophets from Persia, sages from Chaldea, seers from beyond The Marshes, dreamers from unknown corners bearing no name. Years from now, Moses . . ." He stopped suddenly. In the doorway stood Ay with several members of the court, somber in the sudden twilight. Ay spoke slowly.

"The spirit of the greatest of rulers—"

"My father—how is he?" cried the boy with sudden apprehension.

"He is beyond all pain in the halls of Osiris. May the Pharaoh whose countenance shines upon the least of his subjects live forever."

Ay prostrated himself, striking the ground three times with his forehead. A long shout filled the corridors. 'Nophis gave no sign of having heard. His body was marble; only his lips twitched. Moses cried, " 'Nophis! 'Nophis! . . ." Then, to the others, "Quick! It is a fit." The shouting increased.

They carried the boy, babbling, to the throne. It was an auspicious sign; the young monarch was manifestly possessed by a god.

SONS OF THE SUN

1

The sculptor Bek dipped his thin fingers into the cleansing oil and surveyed the chiseled hieroglyphs with critical pride: *Son of the Sun, Amenophis the Fourth; Mighty Bull, Magnificent in Strength; Golden Hawk, Blinding in Plumage; Splendid in Empire, Kingly in Karnak; Wearer of Diadems; The Only-One-of-Amen-Ra; Perfect in Duration, Living Forever; Ruler of Lower and Upper Egypt; Favorite of the Gods . . .* Then he added: *High Priest of Ra-Horakhti, Rejoicing-in-the-Heat-of-Aton.* Turning to his assistant, he said, "There, that's finished. What do you think of it?"

"Fine work," nodded Auta. "One of the best accession tablets I've ever seen. I like the way you've handled the half-depths without too much stylizing. But the tone of it spells trouble to me."

Bek covered his pleasure with a deprecating hand.

"I, myself, think that new method of rendering the hawk figure is rather neat. And did you notice the new spacing of the old Living-in-Truth symbols? But what's this about trouble?"

"Well," replied Auta, "I guess I won't be the only one to notice how you've given Amen-Ra a sort of off-hand nod—a kind of well-I-suppose-you've-got-to-be-mentioned-so-there-you-are dismissal—while the climax of praise is reserved for Ra-Horakhti. What's more, according to this, the new Pharaoh not only announces himself as this god's high priest but revives the old form of his name, Aton. Which means, unless I'm a bricklayer, there'll be a show-down fight to somebody's finish. And I don't mean just the gods!"

Bek smiled. "I imagine something of that nature was foreseen by the power behind the young Pharaoh who ordered the inscription."

"Sure," grinned Auta. "You don't have to wait till the roof floats off to know the Nile is rising. Everybody sees the Queen's hand in this. Didn't she refuse to let Bialim address the crowds in her name and almost start a riot when she made the proclamation herself from the palace steps? Couldn't you just hear the groans of the Amen priests when she announced her regency until the Pharaoh was legally of age? That's about three years from now, isn't it?"

"Not quite. The Pharaoh will be sixteen at the time of early grain. He is curiously old for his age. Did you notice him at the ceremonies?"

Auta put down the mallet, squinting at the emerging statue.

"It was hard to get a steady eye on him; I never saw a crowd so restless. There was an army of councilors, judges, generals, temple-dancers and half of Asia. He seemed rather puny to me, though; pale, almost sickly, with a queer-shaped head and eyes that were always

blinking. Every time the Queen put her hand on his shoulder he would straighten up and smile. But whenever he was let alone he stood uncomfortably staring at the street. Most of the time he kept talking, hand in hand, with Prince Moses."

"You saw the Queen plainly?"

"Who couldn't? She was a foot taller than the other Egyptians. But then, I always forget she's not one of us —at least, not by birth. Speaking of which, reminds me that the young Pharaoh must have a lot of foreign blood in him, even though he's supposed to be a pure incarnation of the gods. Funny; I never thought of it before. They say he goes into trances and has visions. Do you believe it, Bek? But his child-wife, Nefertiti, is straight Egyptian, isn't she? And they say—"

Bek waved a hand toward the unfinished torso. "I think," he said with a kind solemnity, "we ought to remember that even the carved figures have ears—or should have, if you are not entirely forgetting your work."

"Oh, all right, Chief. I was just thinking . . . Going to hear the musicians from Damascus tomorrow? I'm told they can make a stone figure dance. Oh, all right." Auta, whistling carelessly, resumed the mallet.

2

The quarters of the Hebrews were never less than seething. But, ever since the accession, they had been boiling over. Evening thickened the clusters of women. Knots of returning laborers, youthful scholars with old eyes and proverb-loving patriachs disputed, praised, belittled, enlarged upon the significance of the new régime.

"But you exaggerate, Nath," said one of the younger scholars toward the end of an argument whose origin antedated time. "It is only a change in Pharaohs, not a change in government."

"Young man," replied the challenged authority, shaking his curly beard with weary resignation, "history must mean little to you. What have we Hebrews had with each new Pharaoh? New taxes, new restrictions, new burdens, and," he concluded, pleased with his period, "a renewal of the old suffering."

It was obviously an appeal to mob-sentiment, but it was well put. There was a hum of approval. The circle grew closer. So far the debate had gone along familiar lines, but this new arrival might have some ideas of his own. And even an old argument was better than none at all.

"Very true," agreed the younger disputant, whose uncreased forehead was a striking contrast to the deeply gashed lines running from his nostrils, "but this new Pharaoh has given no indication of hatred or cruelty; he is little more than a boy."

"All the more reason why he will be clay in the hands of the persecutors, Hiram."

"But," persisted Hiram, ignoring the elder's manifest wish to sound a final triumphant note of gloom, "I hear that the Queen Regent is not in favor of persecution."

"You hear, you hear," cried Nath testily, "you hear what the wind hears and babbles to the leaves. See for yourself, my young friend. You newcomers of the tribe of Rachel have not begun to learn what we have been trying to forget for generations. In the days of Joseph, a certain Hebrew overseer," he added with undisguised sarcasm, "we were at home in the land. The Shepherd-Kings

were friendly. We were a free people in the country of our adoption. We forgot this was Egypt, bed of hatred. But we were made to remember. No sooner had Levi died, than the very power we had enriched turned against us. A new family of Pharaohs rose, kings which knew not Joseph. Nor us. We were deprived first of our luxuries, then of our vineyards, then of our fields. With each Pharaoh our serfdom grew greater. We built Pithom and Tanis with our hands and cemented them with our blood. We died like flies on the scaffolds; our numbers decreased daily in the slipping pyramids of sand. Soldiers became our overseers, idle counselors our taskmasters. Still we grew. Still we continue to maintain ourselves on the black bread of hate and the bitter water of despair."

The audience sighed approval; it was not unpleasant to linger on the accent of suffering.

"But the Queen has proclaimed—" insisted the unheeding Hiram.

"Honey to catch humming-birds!" sneered the elder. "Wait until the festive mood dies down. The time is coming when even our present slavery will not suffice these murderous tyrants. We will be sent to dig before dawn and to labor past sundown. We will be made to work in the full heat of midday and the cold sweat of the moon. We will be asked to make bricks without straw. . . . Oh, when will come the day when our persecutions will end?" He warmed to his cadence. "When will our wrongs be righted? When will justice smite the oppressor and lay the wicked low? Are the heavens shut to our prayers, has the earth grown hard against us? Is there no one to rise and redeem the children of Abraham and Isaac and

Jacob? Is there none to lead us out of this house of bondage? . . ."

But they had heard this many times before; it was Nath's favorite peroration. They left him in solitary triumph and proceeded to the next agitated corner.

3

A THOUSAND miles away in the city of Khatti, capital of the Hittites, three men were concluding a conference. Only one was a native of the country and he, Sepl, a tall man with knotted features, was its king. The others were Aziru, tyrant of Amor, and a prince of Syria whose almost effeminate elegance concealed an unbridled cruelty.

"It is all very well for you to temporize, Sepl," growled Aziru, "you have space about you. Your lands extend from Hamath to the borders of the Black Sea; your empire stands on the very doorstep of Syria. But we Amorites are playing an irksome game. Hearts itching for freedom resent the vassal's cloak of friendship."

"I agree with Aziru," lisped the Syrian, running a gold chain through his fingers. "This is our opportunity. Syria feels her strength again. The Amorites grow impatient. The Khabiri are ready to join us. We wait only for you."

"And why wait," pressed Aziru, throwing open his clenched hand in a gesture half appeal, half desperation. "When the lion sleeps, the stalkers move swiftly."

"If Aziru will pardon my disturbing his proverb," added the Syrian, "the lion is dead. The enemy we feared lies in his tomb. The throne is occupied by a frail boy; the country is ruled by a woman. I echo my cousin from

Amor. Why do we wait?" The question hung in the air.

"I will tell you, Itakama, and you too, Aziru," said Sepl, after regarding the hairs on the back of his hand. As he spoke, little cords tightened about his lips so that the knots seemed about to break. "Your reports are in the main dependable. And your desire for haste is comprehensible. But it is ill-advised. Egypt is still Egypt. The lion is ill, but it is even more dangerous to attack a sick lion than one tired to death. We will wait until Egypt wearies. If my spies are not all liars, we will not have many years to wait."

"Years?" objected the Amorite, whose smile was a deceit.

"My impetuous Aziru," replied Sepl, with a not too kindly deliberation, "you are at liberty to dispatch your forces immediately upon your return. They will, I should add, be unsupported by any troops from here."

"I am a hot-headed fool," muttered Aziru, "I deserve your rebuke. I see no further than the hour after this hour. And the thought that we of Amor might lose our moment—"

"I understand," interrupted Sepl. "But you will not lose it. You said before that we Hittites had space about us. Thanks to my fathers, and the gods, it is true. But we have more than space; we have time. The moment has not yet come. Egypt, as both of you suggest, is beginning to decline. But traditions of power from the Thutmoses to the recent Amenophis survive. No; to give battle now would be to unify all dissenting parties against us. In six years, ten at the utmost, the factions will grow wider apart; internal differences will weaken the defenses; dissensions will be followed by disintegration. And then—"

"And then?" asked the Syrian, fingering his perfumed beard while Aziru leaned tensely forward.

"Then," answered Sepl with slow satisfaction, "we Hittites will gradually, and without defining our intentions, advance up the Orontes. There we will coöperate with our allies at Amor and declare war in the form of refusal to pay tribute. You, Itakama, in the meanwhile, will seize Kadesh before the Egyptians mobilize. Using that as a base and, calling in our mercenaries, we will proceed to capture the Phoenician coast cities toward the north. Simyra and Byblos will probably hold out, but Niy should fall in the early stages of the campaign. Now, if you will examine this map—"

The lamps in the council-room at Khatti burned until morning.

4

It was a generous forenoon in midsummer. The air had a warm intimacy as if the sun had drawn earth closer to itself. One bright cloud hung above the horizon; long yellow shafts made the sunlight tangible. The rich life of the soil pushed up rank grasses till the grass-points stiffened in the slowly yielding atmosphere. The deepest shadows were the shadows of wild grapes lying heavily against a thicket of broad leaves. Two sprawled in the grass.

"Did you ever see anything so full and round?" demanded Moses, holding a black-purple cluster in an earth-stained hand.

There was no answer. None was expected. They were content to lie there, one with the grass, accepting the sun. It was a lavish contentment.

'Nophis detached a grape and, pressing it between thumb and forefinger, burst the skin.

"So running over with juice," he said.

"The sun does that," said Moses.

"The sun does everything," said 'Nophis. There was a silence. It was as if both were startled by the suddenness of a truth which was in their blood but which had never been taken over into thought. They were thinking now.

"Why!" said Moses, forgetting the grapes, "the sun *is* everything."

A strange fire ran through 'Nophis. He grew momently more aware of the swift burning. The flame burst into speech.

"Moses!" he cried, "it's power. It's creation. It's the source. It's—it's God!"

Again a silence. They were awed by themselves.

"Yes, it's God," continued 'Nophis in a quieter voice. "It isn't any one thing; it isn't only light. What would we do, what would we be without it? If the sun went out, wouldn't everything go with it? Plants, animals, human beings—" He stared at the thought.

"But it isn't just the sun," said Moses. "It's the creative force—intelligent force. Otherwise, how could it make pattern and symmetry? Look at this flower. The sun grew it. But something beyond the sun shaped it, arranged these petals in their minute order, placed this spot of gold so rightly. Something working through the sun did that."

The grasses settled in the heat. They had taken in so much light they could hold no more. So was it with the boys. The exalted moments were going, but they knew the idea would never go.

'Nophis said slowly:

"Moses, we have discovered a great thing. Or it has discovered us. You say it's a power beyond the sun; I call it the heat within the sun. They're the same thing—and they're equal to God. The invisible God we Egyptians have never named, have never dreamed of." He paused.

"Then religion—" began Moses.

"Moses, religion is on the wrong track."

They remained there until the sun stood directly overhead.

5

"Will his resplendent highness, Prince Moses, and the light-scattering Pharaoh grant an old woman a brief audience?"

"Mother!" cried the young ruler reproachfully, as the boys rose.

"Sit down, both of you," laughed Ti. "I did not mean to startle you. But you did look so conspiratorial. And what are those strange parchments? Can you read them?"

"They are parallel texts in Syrian, Hebrew and Babylonian. Moses and I are competing with each other. He always gets his essay done first, and it's so much more orderly than mine."

"'Nophis is too modest, Mother Ti. My work is just clarifying and cataloguing. 'Nophis gets his ideas in bursts; and inspiration hasn't much relation to order."

"And what is the epochal work on which my two graybeards are engaged?" rallied Ti gently.

"Comparative religion, especially the transformations of a specific set of gods."

"Good," said Ti, suddenly becoming wholly serious.

"That, in a sense, is what brought me here. Clap for some cakes and cordial and bring me a cushion or two; I'm afraid it's going to be a monolog." She propped her bright slenderness against the bare sobriety of wall. "Good," she repeated. "We will defeat them easily. It will be a notable battle and one without bloodshed. That you both are scholars—for the Egyptians regard writing with superstitious awe—assures complete victory."

She waited for her audience's applause; she did not even receive its comprehension.

Instead, "Mother, whatever are you talking about?"

"The priesthood of Amen, of course. They have been quietly preparing to rule the country with you, 'Nophis, as their mouthpiece. In three months you will be sixteen, and, being of age, I will resign as regent and you will reign alone—under their direction, as they plan it."

"But why must I? You know how little fitted I am for politics and the business of government. Why don't you make every one happy and continue?"

"As I've told you more than once, 'Nophis, it is impossible. For two reasons. First, I am a woman. The people, not unnaturally, prefer the domination of a male. The great Hatshepset was the one exception—and it killed her. And *she* did not have the added handicap of foreign blood. Second, I can help you, and Egypt, much more in a less conspicuous position. In three months you will put on the two crowns. And that same day you will strike a blow before the politician-priests realize how great a set-back they have suffered."

"Mother, don't say I must declare war on some inoffensive tribe as an excuse for another monument!"

"Something much simpler yet much more dramatic than

that. You will throw the Amen priests into confusion by repudiating Amen."

Both boys sprang up in an ecstasy of surprise. "That's what we've been talking of ever since—" "Ever since we've been old enough to talk," they cried. "Oh, if we only could!" continued the older. "Do you remember, Moses, last week while we were lying in the field eating grapes?"

"When you said that if you were to choose one god to worship it would be the sun?"

"Yes, the shining thing which no priest evokes. Not the sun itself, but the power within it, beyond it. Not Ra-Horakhti but—"

"But Aton, the Light-beyond-the-Heaven," concluded Ti. "That is your coronation speech—and your present to the people of Egypt. The confusing relation between Amen-Ra and Ra-Horakhti will be severed. The priesthood will be too bewildered to act. Every form of the name which spells cupidity will be outlawed; Amen will be nothing but two forgotten syllables."

"Magnificent!" the young king swept on in the full tide of enthusiasm. "The spirit of Aton! It will solve everything. To mark the first step I will change my name on all records. I will no longer be known as Amenophis 'The Peace of Amen,' but Akhnaton 'The-Spirit-of-Aton-is-Restored.' And there will be no more idol-crammed temples full of greedy priests fattening on funerals."

"Yet temples will stand—" interposed Ti mildly.

"There will be no temples at all!" the boy went on, riding a great wave of eagerness. "Instead, there will be open arenas and grassy courts, unwalled fields and flowering terraces where men may come and go at will, absorbing God with the sunlight. They will need no inter-

preter between themselves and shining air. A faith for all people, not mere spoils for opposing parties. A completion, a glad unity—and Moses shall be its high-priest. A religion that will celebrate life, not death . . ."

"Slowly, 'Nophis—I mean Akhnaton," cautioned Ti. "It will be more than a religion, it will be a revolution. As to temples, I imagine it will be some time before men cease to find joy in building them. You, yourself, I fancy, will see why humanity prefers the restrictions of a roof to the unlimited anarchy of space. But that will come later, like Moses' priesthood. Meanwhile, do not hurry to overturn the traditions of two thousand years in one moon's phases. Absence of deliberation is more dangerous than delay. Slowly, my boy, and with security. Aton will give you that. And the people, happy to be rid of their prayer-selling hyenas, will add their mortal but none the less gratifying blessings. And Moses—"

"I will be proud to be the Pharaoh's shadow," said the younger, his large eyes turning to hers with intimate adoration.

"You will be his double, as you always have been," replied 'Nophis-Akhnaton, "as long as Pharaoh is Pharaoh—and possibly after."

"Now, what do you mean by that, you queer boy?" said Ti, who had arisen.

"Nothing, except that some day after I am dead . . . Now don't look so shocked, mother; even *you* don't expect me to live forever. Some day Moses will be the Pharaoh and he'll be able to do all the things I've only dreamed. He's stronger now than I will ever be; and it will be Moses, not I, who will carry out what we have talked over so often. Moses . . ."

"Moses is all you say he is and more," said Ti, putting her arms about both of the young men to their sudden embarrassment, "but you are talking a great deal of nonsense for all that."

"Blasphemy!" laughed Moses. "You forget that the recently christened Akhnaton—"

"But I'm serious," objected the latter, "and you ought to know it, Moses, if no one else does."

"You two!" smiled Ti indulgently. "But Akhnaton it is —or will be three months from now. I'd give a gold scarab to see Bialim's face!"

She left them with their heads close together.

FOUR DOCUMENTS

1

Moses, high-priest of Aton, pushed back the black turbulence of his hair with a hand strangely knotted for a youth of seventeen, and read over what he had just inscribed:

And in the fourth year of his undivided rule it came to pass that Akhnaton, the Pharaoh Living-in-Truth, being nineteen years of age, celebrated his Name Day. And the countries of Nubia, and Aethiopia, and Assyria, and Babylonia did not fail to offer tributes; neither did the kingdom-cities of Sidon, and Byblos, and Khatti, which is in the land of the Hittites, render less than the fullness of their measure.

And there were assembled all the great ones of Egypt, and all the heads of the priesthoods. And with them were the high-priests of Hapi, the god of the Nile, and Neth, the virgin goddess of Saïs, and Ptah, the god of building, and red Set, the evil god of the desert, and Shu, the god of air, and Tet, the tree-god, and Sekhmet, the fire-goddess of Memphis, and Osiris, king of the other-world, and Khepera, and Nephthys, and Horus with his four sons.

And the altars were two hundred and measured each fifty cubits in length and one hundred in height. And the roast joints distributed numbered more than fifty thousand; and the multitudes attending were countless as last year's fruit of the date-palm.

And the King was borne upon a seat of ivory and gold, cunningly carved in the likeness of antelopes; and the number bearing the throne was forty, each slave being twelve heads in height and blacker than their rods of ebony.

And toward evening the multitudes departed to the entertainments arranged, leaving the Pharaoh with the queens of his household, the nobles, and the heads of the priesthoods. And the time of coronation was at hand.

And Bialim came forward with the ritual, saying unto the Pharaoh, Now that the great one is single in power, he whose footstool is the earth, and whose crown is heaven, let him receive the message of Amen-Ra alone. But the Pharaoh answered not.

Then, after a pause, Bialim spoke again, saying, Let the Pharaoh arise and be anointed by Amen-Ra, most ancient and powerful of gods. But the Pharaoh was silent. And they that looked upon him saw that his limbs did not move, nor did his breath leave the body; and his eye remained fixed on the ball above Bialim's head reflecting the sunset.

And Bialim, heeding neither the silence of the Pharaoh nor the murmurs of the court, spoke for the third time, saying, Will the Pharaoh, mighty in power, master of fortune, speak and declare his kinship with the company of gods?

And the Pharaoh, rising as from the lowest depths of sleep, spoke not. But when he stood, a voice issued from

within him, though his lips were not seen to move. And the voice was clear and full. And it said, so that all those about could hear,

Gods? They are nothing. But where there is nothing there is God; there can be no other gods beside him. He is alone. Infinite power is in him. Aton is the symbol of his nameless name; the sun's disc is only the sign of his essence. But ye shall not worship names or signs, neither shall ye bow down to them, nor serve them. There is nought but love which creates in tenderness and makes the hands to faint. He causes the cattle to leap upon their feet; the birds in the dark nest fly forth gladly, their wings are spread with praise to the living God. His rising is beautiful, covering the earth with strength; his setting is not in death but in life without decrease, filling the land with comfort. His mind is all-wise, all-compassionate; all minds are the reflection of his. He is all in All.

And it came to pass at this moment that Bialim, the high priest of Amen-Ra, mounted even unto the seventh step of the throne and his face was wrinkled like a dried plum. And he cried, Behold, the King has uttered a blasphemy. Shall he not be stricken? Will no one forbid him? But none moved.

And the body of the Pharaoh began to sway to the left and to the right with a gentle motion and his eyes closed and a strange singing came from behind his lips. And the words were these:

Aton sets in the western horizon of heaven
And the world goes dead in darkness.
The beasts of the forest creep out;
Lions come forth from their lairs
And night dreams.

Aton rises and darkness is banished.
The beast slinks away.
Man goes forth to his work
And to his labor until evening,
His limbs bathed in thee, his arms glorified.
The barges sail in the sea, upstream and downstream.
Because of thee, fish leap in the river,
Thy rays penetrate to the caves of leviathan.

Because of thee, trees are full of sap;
Sheep dance on earth; eagles have a nest in the rocks.
Because of thee, moon and stars rise in untiring order.

O thou who rootest the man-child in woman
And sowest the seed in man;
Thou who givest to the babe before birth
A nurse even in the womb;
Thou who openest the mouth with speech
And the eyes with beauty;
Thou who givest the quail breath
And strength to pierce the egg-shell
(He cometh forth from the egg
To cry and run about on his two feet)—
O thou sole God beside whom there is no other,
How excellent are thy designs, O Lord of eternity,
How manifold are all thy works!

And when the Pharaoh gave utterance to these words, he tottered and fell to the ground. And a great twitching overcame his limbs that wrenched one against the other, and a foam of spittle issued from his lips. And all the nobles who were there cried with one voice, The god is in

him; the Pharaoh is one with God. Let us obey the voice of Aton. And Bialim and his priests were discomfited.

This did I, Moses, sometimes called Meryra, high-priest of Aton, behold with my own eyes. And this have I set down in the records of the Temple Facing the Brightness. For I was the King's scribe and the King's cousin.

2

"To Moses, high-priest of Aton in the Temple Facing the Brightness, from Akhnaton, the Pharaoh Living-in-Truth. In the fifth year of his undivided reign and the twenty-first of his age. On his journey up the Nile, the king sends by the bearer three gold collars and necklets because of his love, with these tidings in his own name and voice:

"This has been a voyage of discovery and of decision. As we so often have agreed, new truths languish where old superstitions are drawn in with every breath. How can the people accept an unseen, bodiless God when statues of material presences stand at every corner? How can we hope for clear vision when established systems obscure the light with clouds of error? I have done what I could in the royal city of Thebes. I have curtailed the power of the older priesthoods; I have cut down the budget of Amen's adherents; I have forbidden further revenue for his temples. But the temples still stand. From a hundred plinths, from unnumbered walls and gateways, the figure of Amen confronts the populace. His priests are carrying on subterranean warfare against the new religion. But it is not the riches and resources of Amen which disturb me; it is his continual representation. It threatens the fearful,

intimidates the wavering and glares upon the converts still weak in the faith.

"So I have decided on two things: to obliterate the name of Amen from all records and monuments, and to abandon the royal city. The first move must be postponed until the second is accomplished. This will come soon; it only waited a location for the new capital. And this we found yesterday.

"You will remember that, besides Nefertiti of the Ivory Neck and the Queen-Mother, our party included Bek, the stone-cutter 'with queer notions.' Almost three hundred miles below Thebes, the barge turned a bend and, suddenly, we knew we had found the place we had been seeking. Here the cliffs recede, leaving the river, returning six miles beyond. A fine bay is thus formed with a habitable island near its center. There is a generous width of cultivated land along the path of the water, ground fit for villas, gardens and pleasances. Behind it stretches the desert, on the rim of which Bek plans to erect the palace and great temples. Still further back rise the cliffs, and in the face of these I will have my tomb with those of the true believers. It will be as unlike the mausoleums of my ancestors as my religion is different from theirs. There will be no more gargoyles, no more demons of darkness. The whole city will be rich with sculptures that rise in action, not effigies frozen in a false convention. All will be as simple and natural as Bek can make it.

"In this way, also, in the establishment of a more genuine art, we will sever another connection with Amen, for we will discard the traditions insisted on by his priesthood. The new city will proclaim itself in a new way. It

will be as unmistakable as daily life and real as the truth in which I live.

"Bek is going to the first cataract to procure stone for the temples, of which we have planned three: one for Nefertiti of the Gracious Hands, one for the Queen-Mother, and the state temple which is to be yours. The site has been chosen; the boundaries fixed; a name decided upon: The Horizon of Aton.

"Other details must wait until we see each other, which will be within ten days' passing. We will achieve the rest together, Moses. My body continues to distress me, but my spirit is confident. I am in Aton, and Aton is All."

3

"To Sepl, the King in Khatti, from his secret agent 925 whose name is known to him. The third record of fact since his abode in Thebes as a mendicant. The report is this:

"The Pharaoh Akhnaton is now twenty-five years of age and has not been in Thebes since the foundation of his new city, The Horizon of Aton. He is still without an heir to the throne, his Queen Nefertiti having borne him several daughters but no son. His ministers find him disinclined to empire-building; he is reported to have said he wants only to erect a 'spiritual architecture.' He is concerned entirely with the new religion favored by a small circle close to him who follow it blindly; most of its adherents have worship on their lips and distrust in their hearts. It is useless to look for allies among the nobles at court. The high-priest Prince Moses is talked of constantly. He is powerful, ambitious, but unapproachable.

"It is to the older city we must look for our purpose.

The defections there grow daily. Thebes harbors the rival priesthood of Amen which, though outlawed by the Pharaoh's edicts, still maintains a secret and intricate organization extending to all parts of the kingdom. Bialim, its high-priest, will go to any extreme to regain control of the state religion; as an ally he would be dependable though difficult to control. More auspicious for our cause is the discontent among the foreign population. The Hebrews, whose numbers have been doubled by immigration, are disturbed to the point of rebellion. They wait the smallest excuse to rise. As allies, they are dubious, being obstinate and self-seeking; as independent troublemakers, they are invaluable. Others of the slave class are less aggressive but by no means helpless. The Nubians are the most likely instruments for an early revolt. The Aethiopians are less certain.

"To summarize: The Pharaoh is not popular except in his own city. His religion is neither loved nor understood. The Amen priesthood, proud and revengeful, is militant. The colonies are disregarded; the problem is central and all eyes are turned inward. Now would be the moment not to send tribute. Next year the coast cities may be safely attacked. It is almost time.

"The bearer, a camel-driver who cannot read, will remain six days in the city, after which he will deliver the cuniform code to Aziru the Amorite. He is faithful but not to be entrusted with spoken messages."

4

Moses held the letter nearer the unsteady lamplight and scrutinized the sentences again. He read:

"Moses, your godmother Ti confesses, for the first time to any one, she is worried. Your letters are evasive and ambiguous. It is useless to keep things hidden. Moses, I am an old woman; but I am not yet blind. Nor, I should add, deaf. I hear rumors of what is happening; hear them better, perhaps, because of the distance.

"Moses, I had to return to Thebes after all. The City of the Horizon of Aton is, without doubt, the very reflection of the sun; but I cannot, at my age, give up my old home. You and 'Nophis (in spite of Aton, he remains that to me) have moved mountainsides and diverted waterfalls to make a city something of a miracle. I shall never forget my visit. The pillared galleries, the noble colonnades, the living frescoes are more brilliant than I had expected even of Bek. The festivities were more sumptuous than anything I had seen since I came to Egypt. But they did not deceive me. Things—and I wish there were less of them—are not right. Not only echoes, but evidences of it reach me here. I will tell you a few.

"Both of you attach great importance to the ease with which the court has become converted and the rapid progress of the new religion. It is not unnatural for 'Nophis, who is still the credulous boy, to confuse this lip-service with loyalty. But you, Moses, a priest, should know what the professions of new converts are worth. Besides, the nobles who helped the Pharaoh establish a new city and a new religion were scarcely disinterested. Pharaohs have always been free with their favors, and 'Nophis, for all his unconcern with politics, is no exception to his line. I tell you, Moses, that though the court is loud with the praise of Aton, it is with quavering voices that his hymns are sung. Your people accept the abstract, invisible First

Cause because it is partly the command, partly the persuasion of a strangely magnetic Pharaoh. But with troubled consciences they hanker after their old human gods and even more human fears. They have ceased to sacrifice to the so-approachable, so-comprehensible deities like the crafty Ptah and the lovely Hathor. They have turned completely away from stern Amen—and they are frightened. Badly frightened, Moses, so much so that when 'Nophis dies, his one-god religion will die with him. Especially if he fights the priesthoods, not with fire and sword, but with ideas understood only by an inactive minority.

"You must rouse him, Moses, rouse him from his mystical dreams to action. He is courageous in mental warfare; loath to win a physical victory. What could have been more daring than his determination to erase the name of Amen wherever it could be found? The hated syllables were obliterated from every temple wall; tombs were broken into; private houses invaded; desert rocks rechiseled. This, surely, was no half-measure. But did Akhnaton (for, when I think of him as a revolutionary, it is in all his splendor) did he follow up his defeat of Amen by exterminating Amen's priests? On the contrary, he magnanimously—and foolishly—bade them worship with him. And now, here in Thebes, they are thicker and more poisonous than ever.

"An old woman, Moses, old and garrulous, that's what I've become. But you'll understand. The latest rumor is one I can scarcely believe. Is it true that, in spite of his unsuccessful conflict with this particular priesthood, an order is being given to erase the names of *all* the other gods? Unless strong measures accompany this, Moses,

I fear terrible things. To have offended Amen was to alienate only one faction; to declare war on the entire congregation of gods will unite in enmity all the remaining priesthoods—and, unless he rallies them to his side, the people as well.

"If there is a great reserve or some dramatic move behind this, he may avert disaster. But I am fearful. The failure to proceed against the treacherous Amorites is significant. One by one the Egyptian garrisons abroad are being isolated; Byblos and Tyre and Simyra have asked for help. Have they been answered? The Khabiri ravage, Aziru, in spite of every protestation to Akhnaton, despoils, and not a spear, scarcely a word, is raised against them. Something must be done. And you, Moses, must do it. Otherwise— But I cannot put it down on papyrus.

"Help Egypt, Moses, and help my boy. I am, of course, more concerned for him than for all the empires of this world and all the kingdoms of heaven. When I last saw him his appearance shocked me. It is impossible for two years to make such a difference. That young body so bent in upon itself, the hands never at rest, the sudden droop of the chin, the terribly tired eyes. He seemed an old man at the age of twenty-nine. Talk to him, Moses, as you used to. Make him take action. Do something. Do something now."

DIVISIONS OF ONE GOD

Moses made a great effort to unwrinkle his brow. His body, which had grown unusually heavy in his mid-twenties, seemed to support the heavier head with difficulty. His back bent as he entered the little painted kiosk in the garden where Akhnaton was resting against the sunset. Moses began uncertainly.

"Your Majesty, Akhnaton—" But the Pharaoh interrupted, gesturing with a worn hand.

"No, Moses. Let it be in person, not in character. Something besides your inflection tells me we are not going to speak as Pharaoh and high-priest."

Moses smiled without mirth. "You are clairvoyant as ever. And you are right. 'Nophis, I have had a letter from Mother Ti. And another from the priests of Tunip. Both of them compel me to urge you once more—"

"Please, Moses." The hand waved with an effort. "You don't want to return to the old argument, do you?"

"But the situation is new, alarmingly new. Byblos has fallen; Beyrût has surrendered to Aziru; Niy is a ruined memory. One by one our most valued dominions are being wrenched from us. Soon the borders will be threatened

unless we make an example of these camel-drivers who call themselves kings. My own choice," and his eyes burned with a fervor not altogether holy, "would be Aziru. It would give me personal gratification to convert him to Aton—before his execution. Meanwhile, there is Tunip."

"I know. My silence, Moses, does not mean ignorance. Here," he motioned toward a pile of baked clay tablets, "is another communication not unlike yours, I imagine."

Moses read: "*To the King of Egypt, my lord; from the inhabitants of Tunip, thy servant. May it be well with thee, and at the feet of our lord we fall. My lord, Tunip, thy servant, speaks, saying: Who formerly could have violated Tunip without being violated by the forces of Pharaoh? Now, however, we no longer belong to our lord the King of Egypt. We are besieged and surrounded. If our lord's soldiers come too late, Aziru will make us like the city of Niy. If, however, we have to mourn, then Egypt will mourn over those things which Aziru has done, for he will turn his evil hand against our lord. Unless help comes soon, the enemy will do as he pleases in the territory of our lord the King, and because of these things our lord will lament. But now it is Tunip, thy city that weeps and her tears are flowing, and there is no help for us. For years have we been asking aid of our lord the King, the King of Egypt. But there has come to us not a word—no, not one.*"

There was a long pause which neither was able to break. Finally Moses drew in a tortured breath. "That," said he, "is the saddest letter I ever read. By this time Tunip is lost, and, with it, the bravest believers in a forlorn hope. Again I ask you, 'Nophis—"

"I think you had better see this one also, Moses, before you come to finalities." The Pharaoh's eyes were expressionless; only his fingers shook as he passed another tablet.

This read: "*To the Pharaoh of Egypt, my lord; from his servant, captain for the defense in Palestine. This whole land, which began hostilities with me, will soon be lost. The allied princes no longer possess the territory of Seir and hostility prevails against me. As long as ships were upon the sea, the strength of Egypt upheld Naharim and Kash, but now the Khabiri are occupying the Pharaoh's cities. There remains not one prince to my lord, the King; every one is ruined. Let the King protect his land. Let him send troops. If no troops can be despatched, let the King send his officer to fetch me and my brothers, that we may die with our lord, the King.*"

Moses looked up with anguished bewilderment. The eyes that met his were fixed, untroubled. Strangeness filled Moses. In the presence of this resolute calm, this certainty in chaos, his voice came darkly. Still incredulous, he asked,

"And you will do nothing?"

"Nothing, except believe."

"For the first time, I do not understand you."

Akhnaton did not stop him, neither did he encourage him to proceed. The two men faced each other, conscious of the first unhappy silence that had ever stood between them. Akhnaton, though only two years older, looked time-worn as a mummy. The body, delicate as a woman's, with its almost childish shoulders and feminine hips, was an incongruous support for the tortured face. The eyes were embers; a pale light flickered behind the cheeks; the sensitive chin dropped tragically; the corners of the

mouth swooped down to a curve of sorrow. A stricken sphinx, an observer would have said, had it not been for the continual quivering of the lower lip. His was the exact opposite of the figure beside him.

Maturity sat loosely upon Moses. The brusque expanse of chest, the arms huge and hairy like the roots of a giant tree, the muscular loins, the columns of basalt which were his legs, proclaimed masculinity in repose. The mouth was that of a warrior, large, straight, grim in its sensuality. The cheeks were chiseled granite set square above a jaw of stone. But it was the expression of the forehead that dominated. The slightly concave temples accented the vigorous elevation of brow, and the bold eyes that never could take in enough seemed to strain in action as though to meet every thought or object halfway. Seen alone, Moses was taller than most; standing beside the Pharaoh he took on new growth. Where Akhnaton, small-boned and bent, seemed a fragile tree, Moses was a black tower. The two might have been cast for some unfinished allegory of Weakness and Strength, of Futility and Purpose. But the eye would have borne false testimony. For it was the feeble Akhnaton who radiated power; it was Moses who stood, a confused bulk, helpless in his perplexity.

He began again: "We used to understand each other, 'Nophis, even without the use of words. Now it is only words that come to me, and they have the accents of a foreign speech—or," Moses hesitated before the phrase, "a foreign philosophy. Are you ready to see Egypt sacrificed?"

"Sacrificed, Moses?"

"Yes. What else does it come to? The empire is crum-

bling. Jerusalem and the coast cities are gone; tributes have ceased; our world-power is threatened by every marauding tribe. But it is not too late. Your general Horemheb sees that his soldiers keep the rust from their swords. A relieving army could be despatched in three days' time. Their very appearance at the gates of the besieged cities would confuse the enemy; they would fly before the vengeance they have always dreaded. Our territories, in spite of every reason to disbelieve, have faith in the Pharaoh's anger. Surely you are not going to withdraw now? Surely you won't give them up?"

Akhnaton's face seemed to have aged ten years during this brief appeal. He shuddered, looking at his open hands as if a reply were to be found there. Then the brow cleared, the back straightened.

"You are right, Moses. We still use the same words, but our language is different. As to sacrifice, how can we give up that which does not belong to us? What right have we in Lebanon, in Palestine, in all of Asia, in spite of five hundred years of rulership? Is not the right theirs, to govern or misgovern themselves? Is government to be continual subjection, Moses? Expedition after expedition, force to the uttermost, wars whose conquests compel fresh wars to justify them? Always the hot violence, the physical triumphs—and never a victory of the spirit? You speak of vengeance. But what right have we to vengeance, to drown with outcries the voice that has always spoken in silence? We must be still in order to know God. We must always remember that he—"

"Is also a God of action," broke in Moses. "It was not abject thought that chiseled out the name of Amen throughout the land. Faith alone never raised a single

pyramid. You will say that the God of our belief has all power, and that is true enough. But he needs our coöperation in the flesh no less than in the spirit. He deserves our loyalty, 'Nophis, he demands it. You, yourself have declared it; your hymns repeat it: 'There can be no other god beside him.' How are we to establish his eminence, then, if we refuse to carry him abroad? We have been given a message, 'Nophis; we have a light to carry. And we must make it shine in the darkest corners of the world, even if fire and sword have to bring that revelation. Our God is a jealous God and he will not suffer his own to be brought low. He will be in our camp; he will be the blinding sun in the face of the enemy; he will run, a whirlwind of flame, from our chariots. 'Nophis, I feel him in my veins, thundering in my bones. I came here to tell you this. Let me give up my priesthood; I am no longer fit for meditation. Let my arms speak now. Let us praise our God together, by all means. *All* means, 'Nophis. But let me praise him with a sword in my hand."

Akhnaton looked up at the glowing face and thought of a battle-trumpet before daybreak. In contrast, he seemed a shadow seated among ghosts. Neither observed the dusk, but their voices lowered.

"No, Moses. The sword praises nothing; it carries nothing except destruction—especially to him who takes it up. There is no belief in it; it is a denial not only of faith but of life itself. Moses, have you forgotten those scenes when my father would come home in triumph, and proofs of his battle-strength were displayed to the people? If I lived to be older than Snefru's obelisk, I could never forget them. One has always stood out horribly when so much that was lovely left my mind. It happened during the ceremonies

when the victorious Pharaoh returned from his last raid on Nubia. I was just seven—the troops had been delayed in the desert in order to arrive on my birthday—and the priests made a double event of it. I can still see the endless files of captives, jeered at, pelted with mud; still smell the thick dust and sweat growing heavier and more rancid as the heat of day increased. Then the boats full of loot, and the Nubian children smiling as though this were an entertainment especially arranged for them, and the huddled animals, prodded with javelins or slaughtered at every temple to sweeten the steps of the conqueror. But it is that night which is most vivid. In front of the chief temple to Amen there was what at first seemed to be a pink pyramid high as the highest column. Do you remember, Moses? It was built entirely of hands, hands that had been hacked from those who had opposed the Pharaoh, hands torn from the defenders who had resisted our gods. That was a kind of gospel, Moses, the gospel of the sword. I had seen it before; I have looked on it since. But, except in a nightmare, I tell you I never will look at it again."

The shadows reached Moses, turning his copper face to bronze. He took a step the way a mountain might walk. Only a slight stammer showed how great his uncertainty had grown.

"But God," he said, "the God that we found when we were boys and grew up with, worshiped and rejoiced in—surely the one God cannot assume one guise to you and another to me. What has happened, 'Nophis? Has it happened to me? Or can Unity be divided against itself?"

"No, Moses," replied Akhnaton in the tone he used to his youngest child, "there is no division except through

doubt. You love God, but you do not trust him. Therefore, though you love him, you do not know him. For to know him is to be without fear; and your fever for action—your summoning of anger and vengeance—is but the reflection of fear. To know God is to watch the world toppling about you and sustain it with your faith; to witness your enemy sharpen his blade, and shame him with a bared breast; to see the storm gather about you, to hear the outcries of a frightened people, and be as little dismayed as the elements or the smallest flower of the field."

"And has that knowledge brought you happiness, 'Nophis?" Moses asked with an unfamiliar softness.

"No, Moses," answered Akhnaton, "it has not made me happy, but it has made me whole. Mind and heart, self-will and selflessness which were divided—as they still are in you—are one. I tell you, Moses, as it were from the other side of the tomb, until you are willing to give up everything you will find nothing. Mind, will, power can do nothing alone. You believe that because we declare ourselves for God that he must fight at our side, overthrow our opponents, deliver kings and kingdoms into our hands. You believe that the God we found in our innocence of vision has come to serve man. I say that unless man comes to serve God, he will achieve for all his warfare neither victory nor repose. He will seek but there will be no finding until he discards power, relinquishes pride, desires nothing. And then he shall win every victory."

"Without weapons?" Moses raised heavy eyebrows.

"With love," said Akhnaton simply, "with love and knowledge. They alone can bring a peace no armies can establish."

"Next," said Moses with an impatient smile, "you'll ask

me to love those who plot our downfall, to answer our enemies with—love!"

"Yes," replied Akhnaton, "with understanding if possible; but if not, with love."

"Love?" Moses repeated the word as if he had heard it for the first time. "Love? In war-time? No one will thank you for it. Nor for the kind of peace it may bring. Not in these times, anyway, with food scarce, trade at a standstill, and the captains on the point of mutiny. Possibly three thousand years from now. But not today." He went on with mounting conviction. "Even *you* do not believe it. If you did, you would have to give up more than the 'everything' you speak of; you would cease being the Pharaoh."

"Yes," said Akhnaton, "that is what I have decided to do. You are beginning to see clearly, Moses. We cannot communicate the vision to others until it is constant, not merely caught in glimpses. We cannot reflect light until we live in it, by it. There is nothing else for me to do. I cannot deny the will to power and continue to be upheld by its instruments."

"But—but," Moses stammered in alarm and a refusal to comprehend, "it is impossible. This is a mad conversation. Or am I dreaming this crazy dusk? 'Nophis, this is just a kind of fever. These letters, the inactivity, this self-imposed confinement have been too much for you. You must get out from these dim walls, away from the Horizon of Aton for a while. I'm tired, too. Let us go somewhere together for a few weeks—fishing below the Sixth Cataract, or exploring the arms of the White Nile, or start some new excavations at Nekhen. Anything to break through these cloudy despairs. At least, say you'll think

it over. Won't you promise me that?" Moses scarcely waited for a reply but rushed on, fearing the answer. "You can't do this, 'Nophis, you can't. You can't change the habits of a lifetime overnight. Yes, possibly you can. But think what it means. What would you do? Where would you go?"

"The details are not fixed yet, Moses," answered Akhnaton, in a voice that was now part of the twilight. "I may enter some obscure temple in the east, or I may work my way along the roads to Rabbat. I may even remain in Egypt in a hermitage where none will know me. It is all just beginning. I have so much to work out before completion. You see, Moses, our early vision was pure, but we sullied it with pride, self-righteousness, ambition—yes, even the proud ambition of bringing the world to God. That is what we have to learn. You cannot force anything upon men from without, not even God. Revelation is as personal as birth; it cannot be taught, it can only be experienced. That is why I can no longer listen to the priests in my own temple."

"But this is anarchy," cried Moses, bewilderment giving place to alarm. "If you will not think of yourself, think of your people. It is only your word that holds a disrupted nation together. Do you want to see it go down in one blind convulsion? What would Egypt do without you?"

"Find a stronger leader, a Pharaoh after its own heart. You, Moses. You know you've dreamed of it since the days when we stole out of the palace to swim in the forbidden water. I've always known your time would come. A Pharaoh must *be* Pharaoh. But even though you are next in the line of succession, you won't have an easy

time, I warn you. I scarcely need tell you that the army supports my cousin Shakhara, that the Amen priests talk openly of setting up the child Tutankhaton on the throne at Thebes. But, until you tire of making laws and watching men break them, use the power that is in you. You can no more deny the body now than I can deny the spirit. Some day you will come to distrust that power, Moses, and transcend it. How, when, I do not know. But you cannot escape God, not even when you rush from him, bearing his name for a battle-cry. . . . I feel suddenly tired, Moses. Will you help me? Yes, yes, with an arm like that, you must lead. Still, I do not envy you your destiny."

"The whole thing is madness," burst out Moses. "Not for one second will I—"

"Wait until tomorrow, Moses, before you disclaim what your heart desires. And, remember, it is not only for my sake, not only for Egypt, but for the God born and growing in you. You too must suffer through excess. You are strong; you will be stronger when that strength is spent. Good. Leave me now; there will be much to say and more to do tomorrow. Please—" and he was gone.

Moses stood watching a lighted window for hours. Then the yellow square joined the smooth darkness on all sides of it. He watched, with eyes that saw nothing, the black wall become a matted blue and clean-edged shadows grow active. Moses, leaving by the secret gate, was startled to find he had entered a world of cold moonlight.

AN EGYPTIAN IS KILLED

Moses walked on, without aim, without volition, into an undefined world. For a time, he was unconscious of the moon full on his face; for a time he was conscious of nothing else. He seemed to have been walking since childhood in a forest of stone where the trees, broad as houses, were continually changing to columns of mist. When he tried to penetrate them, they solidified. Voices, sometimes attached to gray masses in motion, sometimes bodiless, approached, sharpened into comprehensible speech, and blurred back into confused space. A figure flowed toward him, an absurd composite of Bialim and Amenophis the Third, wavering in outline, the face shrinking to a point and suddenly expanding until it covered half the heavens like a monstrous moon. Only the crown, hanging in mid-air, remained constant. It was a new crown, a studded fillet, so defined against the night that Moses could count each separate bead. Moses reached out his hands; it evaded him. The colored stones broke into scattered stars. Behind the moon, Bialim laughed. "And he wants to be Pharaoh!" The voice, at least, was definite. But had it come out of this maze of shadows or from within him?

Moses, with a wrench of will, focused his eyes to earth. The voice continued in another key.

"Why not? Shakhara knows his business."

"That's right. Shakhara is a man of talent—lots of talents."

"And he knows how to spend them."

Laughter again. These were soldiers speaking, Horemheb's soldiers. With an effort at concentration, Moses recognized the shortened tunics and the green vertical bands. Only their wine-cups kept them from recognizing the high-priest of Aton.

"It's not the life I expected, believe me, when I enlisted," said the first, with the look of one who had lived so long among cattle that he had acquired the aggrieved stolidity of a water-buffalo. "I left the farm to see the world and a lot I've seen of it, a fat lot! The barracks and the temple; the drill-ground and the barracks; the latrines and the guard-house *and* the barracks. They won't even let you near the palace, 'cause why? 'Cause Akhnaton," here his voice mimicked a feminine petulance, "just can't stand the sight of wicked soldiers. Yah—it's a grand life, if you think so!"

"Regular hell of a fire-eating fellow, ain't you?" jeered a one-eyed Theban.

"Yeh. What's it to *you?*" snapped the first.

"Buck up, cow-face," rejoined another with a scar that tilted one side of his mouth into an unhappy grin, "you got your wish, didn't you? You're in the army now, ain't you? And you'd better like it—see? What's biting at you? The lentils ain't so bad and I've been cussed at by worse sergeants. And if you think the women of Palestine are any better than the flute-players of this town, you got another think coming—see?"

"I see all right," grumbled cow-face, "but I didn't join for no women. Had plenty of them at home. I tell you I'm fed up with grubbing and sleeping and waiting to get orders to slap somebody on the wrist. What kind of a country is this, anyway? I could do with a little action before this outfit goes to the embalmer."

"You'll get action enough, farmer," returned scarmouth. "Don't worry about that. Didn't I tell you Shakhara and old Horemheb have been confabbing for weeks? Yes, sir, three weeks now they've had their lousy old heads together, night *and* day. And they're not making up hymns or discovering new gods that don't exist—see? Keep your eye on Shakhara, soldier, and you'll cover a lot of ground."

"Shakhara's our one best hope, and you can write that on your private obelisk," announced a fourth, a subofficer with a face like a clenched fist. "Do you know what they're saying in Thebes? 'Shakhara for loot and liberty.' That's the countersign, fellows. Shakhara's going to make us rich and we're going to make him Pharaoh."

"Go on—tell it to the sphinx. She'll keep your secret."

Moses passed. Again the forest heaved its trunks of mist about him; voices drew back into forms of air. Moonlight was thinner now, thinner and discouraged; it almost despaired of penetrating the narrowing aisles. The moon was sick, Moses concluded, sick as Akhnaton, sick with love. The moon *was* Akhnaton, thought Moses, worn, remote, companionless. Too white and far-off for human needs, wandering in a void; too taken up with heaven to comprehend earth. The Pharaoh should *be* Pharaoh. He had said that. Be Pharaoh. Why not?

Akhnaton was right. Moses might repudiate it until the

Nile went dry, but he had always dreamed of it. He had even, in just such a state of half-consciousness, imagined his first commandments—his and 'Nophis', but strengthened with a vigor that 'Nophis had belittled. He could almost frame his accession speech, a militant proclamation of the one God, now. He could see reorganized armies flashing his word across the desert, beyond Damascus; further than the Indus; even, who knows? into the mythical lands that lay north of Crete and Cyprus. To lead; to lift the sword; to sound the challenge of the God of battle. To be priest and emperor, life-giver and death-dealer in one. There shall be no other Pharaoh beside me. There remained Shakhara. But what was he? A soldier who had never seen service. A parasite in armor. A straw-man upheld by Horemheb. Yet Horemheb knew which way the east wind blew. There was a clean-cut note in Horemheb, a single-mindedness only achieved by asserting oneself over a thousand warring minds. This business of being a priest—!

The alleys had led him to an inlet of the river in which Moses saw himself magnified and distorted. The ripples were particularly harsh to his priestly hood; its image was swollen, deflated, gashed and mocked in the stream. To be a priest—a caricature of a man! His hands completed the protest. The head-dress, never so heavy as now, was taken off. The river took it gratefully, swallowing the gift quicker than a crocodile. It accepted the chain of silver even more swiftly, and its dark jaws closed upon the hieratic amulets that followed.

Moses stood up. There—that was better. The unbinding of his head had freed his heart. He looked to the moon, to Akhnaton, for approval. A stream of clouds had car-

ried it down. Poor 'Nophis. The Pharaoh must *be* Pharaoh.

Moses went on and the world defined itself. There were houses now. Streets no longer dodged into a limbo riddled by the moon. Voices were accompanied by the people who propelled them. Yet these voices? They were actual enough; the men who tossed them about so confidently were tangible. And yet? Moses recalled a scrawled parchment, a covered slate, and two boys studying comparative religions. Snatches of the guttural idiom were translated slowly by his remembering brain. The accents established themselves hesitantly, then with conviction. Yes, it was Hebrew. This must be the Hebrew quarter.

Moses began to see, with the sharp eyes of a foreigner, details that every nation had found strange. Faces over which humility was a poor mask for arrogance; young boys with the brows of aged scholars; a note of spiritual hunger in their most casual gossip, a hint of pain even in their laughter. An old people, an outcast people, abhorrent to his aristocratic blood. He despised these slaves. Yet the curve of those bent backs, the smoldering eyes, the abrupt flight of their hands held a language unaccountably clear to him. Something beyond childhood drew him. Uneasily, answering a compulsion rather than a desire, he approached a group dominated by one whose face was as minutely lined as a sheet of crumpled papyrus unsuccessfully smoothed. It was the scribe Nath, haranguing the lamplit dozen in a crude half-circle before him. Moses no longer resisted his fascination. He took advantage of a shadowed corner.

Nath was in full sail. "How much longer are we to bear the yoke," he stormed, "we who should be a kingdom

of priests and a holy nation! Is there no heart in your breasts of putty? Are you only clay carriers of water, wooden hewers of wood? Has the quick blood of Abraham cooled to a scum? Have you ceased to desire deliverance? No? Why, then, do you wait?"

The crowd shifted uncomfortably. The men looked guiltily at each other, scarcely hoping for one bold enough to justify them with a reply.

"Why do you wait?" prodded Nath.

An undersized rock-breaker on whom the years had let fall their tiredness finally answered. "We wait, O Nath, for a sign."

"A sign?" Nath made no effort to soften his scorn. "If the Flood were to come again would you need God himself to lift you into a boat? Have you not omens enough about you? Is there one of you here who does not know that Egypt is a doomed land, that its laws are without power and that its misrule is at an end? And you ask for signs! Listen. I will tell you a parable."

They came closer. Whatever Nath's faults as an orator, he knew how to tell stories.

"There was a man of Chaldea and he had four sons. And when they had come to manhood, he summoned all four and spoke unto them, saying, 'Ye are come to your manhood, therefore let each of you build houses for yourselves.' To the two older brothers he said, 'Take the timber which is on the south side of the hill'; and he said to the two younger brothers, 'Take the timber which is on the north side of the hill.' And the two older ones went forth and made a clearing and did as they were bade. And when the great storm came it found them secure within stout walls. But the younger brothers put off their building.

'Surely,' they said to each other, 'there is time enough.' Or again they said, 'Sufficient to each day is the labor thereof, and we are weary with working in the fields.' Or again, 'The rains have muddied the timber-path; it will be easier to move the logs tomorrow.' And when the great storm came they had no place for shelter and nowhere to rest their head. Do you understand?"

The Hebrews had followed the tale with childish eagerness and a child's attention to nothing but the story. They were silent; they regarded the speaker with the humiliation of embarrassed sheep.

"Fools!" cried Nath. "You are the younger brothers, putting off the building of your kingdom with vain excuses. You are the idlers, letting time and timber rot while the storm gathers. And when it breaks, nothing will save you—the Messiah himself will not be able to find you." He ended with a snort of disgust.

"They say," began the little rock-breaker and coughed. "Some of the temple-people say that Akhnaton has been changed by God. They say he is refusing to use force against his enemies. They say he is going to bring peace to earth and grant every man his wish."

"What else do they say?" inquired Nath with false encouragement.

The tired man hesitated, glancing over his shoulder. He swallowed and then, in a whisper that tried to be courageous, "One of the men in the quarries said he might be the Messiah!"

"The Messiah!" Nath laughed rudely. "So that's what you're waiting for! God pity you all if you look for *that* to save you. Akhnaton isn't the first and he won't be the last to use words and lull you into sick dreams with sighs

of resignation. The Messiah, indeed! I tell you no man among you would know the Messiah were he to walk the earth. He will not come with dubious humility and rewards for the weaklings. He will cleanse the land of its iniquities; he will demand an accounting—eye for eye, tooth for tooth. He will bear the scales in one hand and a sword in the other. And the regiments of the righteous will follow him; the armies of the Lord of Hosts will be prepared. Not you! When the glitter of his shield is a constant lightning over earth, when the fury of his battle-trumpet calls forth Behemoth, you will still be asking for signs!"

There was a shuffle of feet as the half-ring opened to admit one who had missed all but the last few sentences. A tall body; a hawk-like face. Eyes that held passion but no sentiment. Mouth straight and impersonal as a line of numbers. The voice sharp as the long swoop of his nose.

"Not then, Nath, for then we shall have our leader. You have forgotten the prophecy. Or do you no longer believe in it?"

For a moment Nath faltered. "How shall a rabble-rouser such as I exchange words with a priest and the son of a priest? Surely fulfillment of the prophecy is with the Lord Jahveh. But, Aaron," he addressed his rebuker directly, "our leader may be among us now. How can he reveal himself before we are worthy? How can he declare his leadership until he has something to lead? Are we to throw the entire burden on him, Aaron? I tell you all," his voice rising to its exhortative pitch, "we must act. We must refuse to go to the quarries. We must destroy the brick-yards. We must—"

The half-circle had broken as a rolling body lurched

through it and a thick voice called out, "Hey, there! What's all this? Bunch of niggers trying to stage a riot or something?"

One of Horemheb's soldiers. Moses recognized the buffalo features in the half-light. The stupid mouth hung dangerously; wine had inflamed the loins with lust for action.

"Well! Well! Speak up, somebody! I suppose you was just quietly discussin' the taxes or how much you love your dear Pharaoh, eh? Come on." Then, as the knot of men refused to break, "What's the big excuse for all this noise? Here—you!" He seized the puny rock-breaker by the wrist, twisting his fore-arm.

Aaron spoke quickly. "That man has broken no law. You are hurting him."

"Yeh? What's it to *you?*" The ugly tone was accompanied by an uglier light in the eyes.

Moses had watched the drama, felt it draw him in. He was no longer a spectator. He stepped into the light. He spoke.

"You are exceeding your duty, soldier."

The words were as automatic as his action. The man half turned, but his grip on the writhing figure tightened. "Is *that* so! Well, an' who in the name of Set are *you?*"

"A representative of the Pharaoh Akhnaton. His word is mercy, as you should know. If you have forgotten, you'd better go about your business—if you have any."

This promised well. The buffalo-face spread to a dirty leer. Moses no longer fought against the rising blood.

"The Pharaoh Akhnaton is it? Well, you won't be saying that much longer—see? There's goin' to be a real

Pharaoh—see? Not a snivelin', hymn-singin' heretic. Not a cowardly— Oho, *that's* your game!"

He threw the stone-breaker aside like a disused rag and struck at Moses.

Moses forgot the world. He forgot the strained faces of the Hebrews, white masks in mid-air; forgot Akhnaton and the use of words. Speech flew to his hand. His fingers closed about the soldier's throat. A sword flashed, was arrested, fell soundlessly on sand. Moses saw nothing, sensed nothing, but the pounding of a great wave within his breast. He was unconscious of two arms hammering against him, unaware of their slowly diminishing strength. It was only when the red pulse began to subside that he realized the wild beating was outside, not within him, that it was stopping, that it had stopped, and that his hands were holding up a heavy weight.

He turned as in sleep to the gathering crowd of Hebrews.

"This man—?"

"Is dead," said Aaron. "That is the bravest thing I have ever seen done by an Egyptian. And to do that for a Hebrew, for a slave—"

"For a god," said Moses, still in a trance.

"Whatever your reasons, we will remember. But you cannot stay here. Horemheb's soldiers are not squeamish. In their cups, an Egyptian opposed to Shakhara is as good sport as an unwilling girl. No, not that way. Another killing and the troops will butcher every Hebrew in the city. Here," Aaron motioned to a half-dozen of the hardiest, "dispose of this. In the south section beyond the Traders' Gate near the embankment. The sand shifts to mud there. Be sure you bury it deep."

Aaron's shoulders squared as he drew a scarf-like mantle about them. "It is not a long way," he said, "but the streets are devious and there is little light. Will you follow me?"

There was no conversation. To Moses the snaky labyrinth might have been the main highway; he was as unconcerned with distance and direction as a sleepwalker. He could not say whether he had been propelled an hour or an eternity. For all he knew, the glare that lit a corner of the sky was a false dawn. He did not notice it was in the wrong quarter for daybreak and that the moon had come back into the heavens. It was with an effort that he realized he had been standing for some time in an open space and that Aaron was showing him the path.

"And so, farewell, Egyptian. I do not know how you will regard the doings of this night here or," gesturing to the reddening glow, "there. But we of the quarter will only think of what your God and our God accomplished together. Yours is a name we would mention in our prayers. Might we know it?"

"It is of no moment," replied Moses. "And I have my own prayers to think of. Good-by. We shall not meet again."

"Good-by," said Aaron, "and—good-by."

They regarded each other conscious of a need to say more and the knowledge that there was no more to say. Aaron was the first to turn aside. Moses set his face toward the growing color.

MOSES DECIDES

1

Moses went on and the world he knew returned to him. Here were the memorial pylons and here, quite where they should have been, were the high gates hunching their backs higher than ever in wavering moonlight. Reality sprang back with the smart of his soles and the faint crunch of sand beneath his sandals. He had had a long walk, he told himself, a tiring walk, but no more. Anything else was unreal. That nightmare of misunderstandings with 'Nophis, unreal. The drunken, seditious talk of the soldiers, unreal. The—his mind hesitated to approach it—Hebrew quarters, unreal. Unreal, unreal. A fantastic somnambulism from first to last. He had never struck a man down, had never felt cords of flesh grow slack in his fingers. Horrible delusion. The face of the Egyptian swam suddenly before him, green in the moonlight, and the tongue black, and the bulging eyes all white.

"Unreal, unreal!" cried Moses, and looked at his hands. They were red, a red that shone. Then he looked up and saw it was the reflection of that unnatural dawn. It was brighter now, there was yellow in it; it throbbed

with an irregular but gathering pulse. A pulse of flame, thought Moses, and immediately rejected the lurid thought. But he no longer walked. He began to run heavily toward the glare, toward the palace.

The air thickened as he ran. The Nile smell was crossed with the acrid menace of burning wood; clots of men and women soured a rising wind. The glare was contending with half the heavens now, as though night were struggling to hold back an ominous day. It was the palace, there could no longer be any doubt. Moses ran faster, his apprehension growing into hideous certainty. A priest of the inner sanctuary, his face disfigured with dark stains, stumbled past. A group of women—Moses recognized two of the Temple-dancers—lurched into him. Crying children were being dragged along by refugees running down blind alleys. Moses felt he was being sucked into a whirlpool of hot winds. He clutched the first man he could lay hands on. Before he could shape his question, the man gave a desperate cry of fear, shook Moses off, and disappeared into smoking darkness.

Sparks began to shoot about him; he could hear the crack and lurch of falling beams. Crowds were rushing in disorderly waves; he could make no more headway against them than against a stampeding jungle. He was being beaten. But he must break through this shouting element, an unknown element gone mad. He threw his bulk into it, felt his clothes tear, his sinews snap. An arm was thrown about him, dragging him through a blazing tide. It was Ay.

"Prince Moses! All praise to Aton! I've been looking everywhere. They haven't found you yet? You're not hurt?"

"No. Scarcely scratched. But you, Ay? And these mobs? What has happened? Tell me."

"Not here. No time for talk, now. Come."

In spite of his wizened frame, Ay pulled Moses toward the river. Cries were fainter now; he could no longer distinguish between human voices and the wind's. A mass of smoke shook out above the flames like a malformed fist. The Nile was crowded with boats scattering like water-spiders, colliding, spilling their surplus weight, floating with open jaws on evil-colored ripples. Ay guided him toward a concealed inlet.

"Here," said Ay. "This will do." Then, to the boatmen, "Pull away. Hoist sail after we're in midstream."

The skiff joined the welter of boats, threaded its length among them, repelled a score of invaders, threshed into clear water, and spread sail.

"Well?" said Moses.

"Shakhara," replied Ay. "Shakhara and Horemheb. Bialim may have had a hand in it, too, though I doubt it. It's a soldier's revolution. Fire, murder, rape—all the pleasures of looting a town and none of the dangers. Augh—the jackals, the carrion-eaters!"

"But when—?" The tone betrayed Moses' inability to comprehend.

"Shortly after dusk. I noticed the absence of the guards. Then I saw groups of Horemheb's men going from the drill-ground toward the sanctuary instead of away from it. I had had my suspicions for weeks."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing," said Ay bitterly. "There was nothing to be done. Before I could reach the connecting passage, the sanctuary was aflame. That must have been the signal.

Three minutes later, soldiers were in the courtyard, in the servants' quarters, running down the royal apartments—everywhere. Captains shouting orders in the Chamber of Quiet, drunken pigs pulling down the embroidered hymnals. I was lucky to escape. They were still at the young girls, hadn't got round to the old men, when I dodged in back of them."

"And 'Nophis—I mean Akhnaton?" asked Moses impatiently.

"The Pharaoh has not been seen," replied Ay. "His apartments were fired at the same time as the Temple. He may have escaped. I saw the Princess Beketaton and her maids making their way through the lines. He had as much warning as they. The desert is wide, and the Nile is long. We can only hope."

"But what are we doing here?" cried Moses, his voice as tight as his hands. "Are we to hide from that scum? Let us go back. At once."

"Later, perhaps," said Ay. "It is a military dictatorship. Those flames must burn themselves out first. Besides, there is a price on your head."

"On *my* head?"

"Yes, Prince. Shakhara has enthroned himself. And he is making sure of no rival claimants. Particularly none of the royal line. Any soldier who presented him with, well, evidence that you were no longer in a position to dispute his claim would have a rich reward. A legion, or a captaincy, at least. Wait a week, two weeks. When the flames are cold, it is easy to kick the ashes. You know the proverb, Prince. There will be a counter-movement. The people may not understand Akhnaton, but they understand Shakhara only too well. He will not hold them, not

even with his borrowed soldiers. Wait a month. Wait till the troops are sorry-sober, and you will be able to topple Shakhara with a phrase."

"But where do you purpose to go now?"

"Wherever you say, Prince."

Moses was silent. He looked back at the angry havoc. There were no answers there. He looked at the oily waters which had twice restored him. No one but Akhnaton could quiet a tumult wilder than those fires, darker than these waters. And Akhnaton had failed. Or had he, Moses, failed himself? "Make him take action," she had said. "Do something now." He looked up sharply.

"We will go to Thebes," he said.

"To Thebes?" Ay was incredulous. "To the stronghold of Amen? To Bialim's own city?"

"And the Queen Mother Ti's," said Moses, quieter than he had been since his last thought of her. "We will go to Thebes."

2

"It MUST have been a terrible journey, Moses. That wretched, fish-smelling boat, and no canopy, and the sun at its worst now, and no wind to help you."

"It was not a happy voyage, Mother Ti. But let's not talk of it. Tell me about yourself."

Ti was older, unaccountably older, Moses thought. Echoes of the quick raillery were in her thin voice, the right hand had the same trick of punctuating her sentences with an airy mark of exclamation. But the face was the face of a child suddenly aged, suddenly confronted with a disillusion it could not accept and which it had to acknowledge. Unhappy wisdom had taken its fee gradu-

ally from Ti and had given her nothing but its undesired self. She spoke with an effort, hoping to keep the weariness from asserting its weight.

"I am as you see me, Moses. No," the hand fluttered gallantly, like a flag before it is hauled down, "don't say it. You were never meant to be a diplomat, much less a courtier, my boy."

"Boy, indeed," laughed Moses. But there was no mirth in him, only a dark hole where pride and ambition had been uprooted.

"Yes, you are grown—you must be nearing thirty now. And there is the beginning of a wrinkle running between your eyes. And—bend over—that's actually a white hair in the bramble-bush that used to be your hair. O Moses!" —she could fight it down no longer; the voice sagged in surrender. "What has life done to us! I was so clever; I thought there was nothing I could not foresee. 'Nophis' father was a hunter and I knew that death would track him down like the beasts he loved to stalk. But 'Nophis! No miser ever watched over her treasure the way I watched over that child. Even when he was a baby, I planned his safety, prepared his manhood, laid traps for his enemies. I founded kingdoms for his children—while he was still in the cradle. And now—" She let grief carry her off.

"It's my fault," she cried in a paroxysm of self-reproach. "I am to blame for it all. I kept him too close to me. I should have let him grow strong in a world of men, away from me, away from my fears. But how could I help it? How could I, Moses?" She grasped the huge hand that was patting her shoulder. "That was my sin. He should not have been so much to me. Yes, I sinned. I loved him

more than I loved the gods themselves—and our gods are jealous gods. O Moses, what are we going to do?"

She wanted no answer.

"I have outlived my time," she cried. "I dare not even face my world. Egypt's name a byword for disgrace, the barbarians at our doors, a weakling on the throne. And 'Nophis' dream of a liberated mankind happy in a liberated god—gone with 'Nophis. What is there left?"

"Perhaps, Mother Ti, it may not have come to the worst. Perhaps he may have escaped." The voice was cheerful enough, but the face was averted.

"Do you think so, Moses—do you really think so? No, I can tell you don't. It's no use to lean on so hopeless a hope. O my 'Nophis. O my boy—"

Moses helped her to the corner-couch, a grotesquely painted day-bed, shaped like a yawning tiger in whose hollowed back, pillows stuffed with ibis feathers were piled. Moses sat beside her, offering no comfort but the silence of his consoling hand. Presently Ti's shoulders were still and she sat up.

"This is not the way. This will help nothing, no one. Scold me, Moses. The living have the right to life. Let's talk about them. You first. I've never worried much about you, Moses; you've always been so self-reliant, so sure of your destiny. Even now I know that nothing, not even the greatest obstacles, will stop your career. Am I wrong, do you think?" The question was tender rather than anxious.

"Yesterday I might have shook my head, but inwardly I would have agreed." Moses struck a fist in the palm of his hand. "Today I want to say yes to my destiny, but I don't know what it is. Everything's happened so quickly. My sense of values, my certainties, my fixed beliefs—all

tumbled about me. Last week I would have hailed any occasion to succeed 'Nophis—any occasion except this. And now, I don't know what I want, what to do. Possibly I'd better stop searching myself and go back to the Horizon. I can, at least, throw myself into action there, challenge Shakhara, and stop this treacherous thinking."

"No, Moses. Not yet, anyway. You'll have two forces to fight, and nothing to fight them with. Bialim and his priests are already disputing Shakhara's claim. They're putting forward one of the dubious descendants, the child Tutankhaton. The people are still too dazed to know where to look. It's civil war; it will last until one exterminates the other. And both would combine against a third. No, the Horizon is not a healthy place for any one at present."

"But that's not all, Mother Ti. I can't decide about my future because I can't decide about myself. I don't know myself any more. I told you about choking the Egyptian soldier, how horrified I was later when I realized what I had done. But I remember now I was glad when I felt the resistance going out of him and my thumb and fingers meeting in his throat—yes, glad! Think of it, Mother Ti. And for what? For nothing. For a twisted little slave, a workman—a Hebrew. What has happened to me?"

"Moses," Ti's face was deader than he had ever seen it, he had never noticed the bones before. The voice which, as a child, he said was full of dimples, was rigid now as her own statue. "Moses, have you ever thought about your father?"

"No," he said directly, "nor about my mother. Both died before my earliest memories. The first thing I remember is being held up to dry and the great Amenophis

laughing. He was all that the word 'father' ever meant to me. And you, dear Mother Ti—" His arms completed the sentence. It was not easy to shake him off.

"But when you *do* think of your father, what is he like?"

"Why, like—I can't say. I have no associations to place him with. I can't picture him except in his official rôle, in his vestments, standing in the Inner Square, his shaved head uncovered, sprinkling Nile water on the knees of Ra-Horakhti."

"Moses." Ti's syllables were like rain dropping on a slack drum-skin. "Who do you think your father was?"

"Who else but the head-priest in the Temple of Ra-Horakhti to which I was dedicated? Why—what can you mean?"

And so Ti told him. She told him all there was to tell of the frozen Princess Thermutis and the fiery Amram. And Moses listened as a boy listens to a fairy-tale he wants to participate in, but cannot believe. It was a strangled voice that found strength enough to question.

"Mother Ti, isn't this a strange time to tell me such a fantasy?"

"Moses, this is the time when you must be told the truth."

"The truth?" he cried. "Then I am really mad. I have suspected it all along. All Egypt has gone mad—why should I be exempt? A Hebrew! Could that have been the reason why I was glad to kill that soldier? Because I—you mean it?—am the son of a slave?"

"He was not a slave, Moses, he was a priest."

"A Hebrew, at any rate. And those dirty animals were —augh—my 'brethren.' Curse you, my mother, curse you! Curse the lust that bred me! To dishonor yourself so, to

defile your seed! O God! O Mother Ti, tell me it's all a mad joke or a bad dream."

"Try and get quiet, Moses, try. I know how great the shock is. But you had to be told." Now it was Ti's slim hands that spoke comfort. "We can't go ahead in half-darkness. And we mustn't go back. Forward, Moses. There's much to be done—and by you. No, don't answer. Let me talk a minute; just say it's her age makes her garrulous and we must be patient with the old." Something of her lost whimsicality crept back. "One of my boys will be a great leader yet. You're not to talk back, do you hear? A leader, I said, and over how many countries! But you must get away first. A year or two abroad. It doesn't matter much where, as long as it's one of the neutral countries. This civil war will flame, smolder, and die in two overflows. Shakhara is a figure-head; the army is honeycombed with Amen propaganda; half the soldiers will go over to Bialim, the rest will bargain for the highest bidder. You'll come back then. Will you stop shaking your head! It will be a country well worth finding, well worth re-shaping. But first you must find yourself. And in new surroundings, quiet places."

"Mother Ti, it's no use. I don't want to lead. I don't want to live."

Her gesture was mock-imperious.

"Hush! Let me think." The pause was strangely short. "Of course. The very place. My own country: Mitanni. The Hebrews call it Midian. I'll send a retinue with you. No; it will be safer if you travel less conspicuously. Ay will take you as far as the border. He knows cross-country like a quail. Not a word out of you. Not tonight; tomorrow we will talk as much as you please. The events of

the day are sufficient until the evening. Let us sleep over them."

She rose, putting her lips on his forehead, "O Moses—" The raillery was brushed aside. "May the gods watch over you in Mitanni."

"Midian," said Moses.

BOOK TWO

"And he said, Here am I"

EXILE

Midian. Green against green everywhere. Seas of shining grass running into a sky of early apples. Tops of hills, tree-pointed, floated above a low lake of mist, their olive flanks more impalpable than a mirage. A few stars held their faint silver. In stone-sprinkled fields, rocks seemed only denser atmosphere than the liquid air. Roads ribboned the distance in dust-colored loops. The sun had not yet risen. Moses sat down by a well.

This was the place. He knew it without reservation. Here was peace. Peace after turmoil of departure, the forced flight across Egypt, the hurried caravan in which, disguised as a merchant of oils, he had outwitted Shakhara's spies. The false alarms, the silent marches by night, the doubling back by day, the passionate scene with Ay at the border, the last stretch on foot alone—all the disorder of those fortnights was fused by this green stillness. Here the elements themselves took shape. All earth met him in the space between his toes. The central flame of the sun, the cold heart of the storm met here; wind, fire and rain strengthened this sliver of grass. Here—and he put the wet blade between his lips—was the first cause;

life began here. Here, far from books and the old disease of thought, he would live; here, divorced from an imagined destiny, he could learn what elements were his. Learn to know himself, be himself. Earth, the great mother, was nearer than the All-Father . . . His father . . . Amram . . . Was that the explanation? Was that why, for all their dirt and meanness, he had felt something less than kinship but more than sympathy with those Hebrews? Or *was* it kinship, blood surging over every barrier and speaking to blood? Was it—he must face this thing—love? . . . The word was not his, yet he could not put it wholly from him. The thought of Akhnaton was as painfully part of him as his racked bones.

No. He must not go backward. The sick dizziness passed. It was only earth lurching, not his mind. His body had not yet forgotten the endless slip and stumble of those cursed camels. He quieted himself with another grass-blade.

The east was in motion now. The green wash had shrunk to a broken chain of pools in a peach-colored plain. The last star fell into it and Moses fancied he could see ripples of light as it sank. Mountains of amethyst crumbled and went off in corn-flower smoke. The first runner of rose fingered the air, climbed the smooth bank and spread itself in scarlet. Tendrils of fire reached from the branch toward the zenith, touched it, held it, until the heavens were laced with a twisting tree of flame. A yellow vein ran through the flowing trunk, widened, took possession. The hills stood up, shaking themselves free of the sky, adding mass to their outlines. Twigs separated from each other; every leaf took on golden distinction. The sun rose with a sound of bells.

Sheep-bells. Earth moved to a low tinkling. Little gray

clods of earth walking about, feet with a far-off pebbly whisper, a sleepy baa-ing of lambs. Dissonance of bells. A second flock. Moses could not distinguish the guides. Only the bell-wethers had come round the curve of the hill. Then the two flocks emerged from opposite directions. Both were headed toward the well. They descended slowly. The sun, swinging clear of the hills, enriched them with shadows, setting off their purity, changing their clay sides to silver fleece. The nearer shepherds began to sing an old Mitannian folk-song in a thin treble.

Let us lift our eyes to the mountains,
Firm on their feet of rock;
For over the hill comes the Shepherd,
And he will feed his flock.

Moses' eyes confirmed his ears. They were women; as they came closer he could see they were girls, children among them. The other shepherds, young men, had seen them also, and were calling to them. When the girls made no reply, the men shouted to their flocks, prodding the ewes and driving the younglings faster down the road. It was a race to the well, with the girls already in the lead. Moses, responding to the quick blood, watched two of the children draw away from the rest: a bright curly-headed tomboy and her taller, frank-eyed sister, supple as a willow in the wind. The two kept pace, although their stride was dissimilar. The smaller, tousle-haired one bounded, no, bounced along like a rabbit, while the taller one ran gravely in an even rhythm, the long legs taking grass and stone with equal ease. As she turned to gauge the distance, Moses saw her face. Accustomed to the full moon of Egyptian features, its length was something of a shock. The long oval reminded him of Mother Ti. The likeness

was not in feature but in effect, for the eyes were serious and straight whereas Ti's were slightly oblique and never without the suggestion of a twinkle. The chin was pointedly defined instead of suave, the mouth generous rather than precise. Still, the resemblance persisted; it even grew as her approach pronounced the dissimilarities.

The two girls reached the well simultaneously, unconscious of Moses on the further side.

"Hurry, Zipporah!" gasped the younger. Then, between quick breaths, "They'll be here in a minute. Quick!"

Joined by a few of the others, the girls drew bucketfuls and emptied them swiftly into the long wooden troughs. Their flocks were not so fast, and before the first sheep nosed his way to the water, the shepherds from the opposite hill had interposed. A gawky youth spread legs and arms in front of them.

"Back there, back! Room for your betters."

"Betters—ha!" cried the tousle-haired girl. "Idlers! Nine-hour sleepers! Nettle-rash! Dog's-itch! That's what you are!"

"Hush, Tana. Remember your tongue."

Moses heard Zipporah speak for the first time. It was a strange, dark honey. No, it was a startled partridge rising from cover. No, far quieter. It was the sound a shadow of the moon might make.

But it was none of these things to Tana. To the angry child, it was only her sister scolding.

"I'll mind my tongue when they mind their toes. Look where you're going, you clumsy cows!" Then, to the gangling leader of the shepherds, "Weren't we here first?"

"First or last doesn't matter," grunted the aggressor. "Not if you take that tone—eh, fellows?" His mates grinned a broad approval. "Come on," he put a large

hand on Tana. "Give us an armful, and when you know us more you'll like us better." His arm slid above her waist.

"Take your hands off, you rutting he-goat!" The child knew the farmyard without loving it.

"Tana!"

"Well, that's what they are, Zip'rah. And worse. Clear out, and go back to your sties!"

The tall shepherd gave a sign. The others advanced upon the girls awkwardly but hotly, wetting their lips and wiping hands on their leather pouches.

Moses came from behind the well. The sudden apparition even more than his size completely unnerved them. The mere rumble of his voice—"Let these children alone" —was enough. When he wrenched the staff from the foremost, striking two of them across the shins, the rout was complete. The sheep scattered and the men, glad to excuse their retreat, ran after, trying to herd them together. The girls giggled and Moses, after a rueful glance at the vanishing backs, laughed with them. He had not laughed since—it was too long ago to remember. It was good to laugh, good to hear laughter about him. Midian was a glorious country and this the best of worlds. He turned to the girls.

"Why, there are only six of you! When you came running down the mountain, I thought it was an army of Amazons. Come, bring up your flocks and we'll water them together."

His eyes met Zipporah's. She did not look away. But she stopped smiling.

"You are as strong as you are good," she said.

"Good?" The laughter gave way to a stammer. "But it would be hard not—I mean, it is easy to be, if you call it

that, my child." Moses felt as stupid as the shepherd had looked.

"He calls Zipporah a child," screamed Tana, "and she's nineteen years *old!*" It was a good joke, and even bad jokes were rare. The girls' enjoyment ran up and down the scale.

"Nineteen," said Moses, with exaggerated solemnity. "A reverend age. Pardon me if I address you from the other side of the grave, for I have one foot in it. Children, behold a septo-octo-nonagenarian of twenty-eight!"

Even Zipporah joined this time. "You *are* good," she insisted as though the matter were still in dispute. Their eyes held each other again. Tana's voice tore them apart.

"Water, Zipporah! More water. Help us with the buckets."

Zipporah put her hands on the pole, but not before Moses had put his weight upon it. The side of his palm touched the back of her hand. She did not move it. Ten times the bucket was lifted, ten times let fall. Moses and Zipporah neither moved nor kept count.

"Zip'rah! You're flooding the whole field! Do you want to drown the flocks?" Tana tugged at her skirt. Zipporah's hands fell, but not her eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"A stranger," he answered. "A stranger in a strange land—and a stranger dream."

She looked down for the first time.

"Your clothing and your accent say you are not from Midian. You are an Egyptian?"

"I was once. A relative, so to speak, of the Queen Mother Ti. I am now a wanderer," said Moses and reproached himself for the evasion. He wanted to hide no smallest thing.

"Ti of Mitanni? Ti the Terrible?" cried Tana, as though a legend had come to life. "Have you really and truly seen her?" The mischief was lost in curiosity. She peered at Moses like an inquisitive squirrel.

"Her terror," he replied, "is a tale to frighten babes with. Actually, she is the loveliest lady in the world."

"The loveliest?" mocked Tana with a teasing comprehensive glance at the two of them. "The very loveliest?"

All the girls giggled again. All except Zipporah, who walked over to a lambkin that had cropped and drunk so much it tottered with every breath.

"It's so tired, I'll have to carry it home. You'll come with us? My father will want to know you. He met the Pharaoh and the Queen Mother when he visited Egypt years ago and he has never forgotten. You'll make him happy; you'll come, won't you?"

Moses nodded. "For your father's sake, of course. Which one of his daughters is he like?"

He started to rejoin her, but Tana anticipated the move and sprang jealously between them.

"It's my turn now, Zip'rah. You've been talking to him all the time."

She took Moses' hand with infantile possession as they started the upward climb.

"Our father is Jethro. He used to be a priest of Istar, but now he's a gentleman farmer. Our house is the largest one in two days' walk. My brother Hobab is a captain in the cavalry and has been in three wars. We have two barns and I have a special summer-house for my own family. There's Dudu, that's my oldest child (she came all the way from Babylon in a painted box and has real crystal eyes) and Nibble-Nose, the white rabbit, and—let's see

who else—oh, yes, and Prickle-Paw, that's the kitten, and Sindabi, the parrot."

"And the others?" inquired Moses, indicating the half-dozen trudging ahead of them.

"Well," said Tana, pointing them out with the air of a professional surveyor, "the one furthest along is Naara. She's our cousin and she lives with us all the time. Then comes Thum-khipa—the one with the blue skirt—that's the baby, another cousin. Then there's my brother Hobab, in the army. But I've told you about him. Then there's the twins, Suba and Ruma. Ruma's at home because she ate too many green mulberries; Suba is the one next to Zipporah. I don't have to tell you about Zip'rah." Then she added quickly, "But you'd better not make love to her. That's all except me. My name's Tana. What's your name?"

"Moses. And is it so dangerous to fall in love with your sister Zipporah?"

"Oh, very." The child was quite serious. "Nobody would dare to. Don't you know what would happen?"

Moses shook his head. "Some awful fate, I have no doubt. But what? Can you tell me?"

"Of course. Haven't you heard about the tree in father's garden? Listen, then." It was her favorite story. She had heard the legend so often that she knew every syllable, even those she did not understand, by heart.

"You know about the Garden of Eden, don't you?" Moses assured her he had heard of it. She continued, "Well, when Eve picked the apple, she broke the limb that held it and when they were driven out, Adam used the branch for a walking-stick. Later, Cain stole it, and it was with this rod that he slew his brother Abel. So,

although it came from Eden, it was accursed. The patriarchs could do nothing to change or destroy it. Enoch hid it, but dogs brought it back. Noah tried to drown it, but it floated. Shem threw it in the fire, but it would not burn. Abraham could not break it, and Jacob flung it in the roadside. Robbers found it there. When thieving Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt, they passed through Midian. So it came to us. Father's grandfather had nothing but ill fortune all the days of his life and just before he died, he said to his children, 'Take that evil rod and bury it.' So they did. And the next day there was a stir in the ground. And the rod took root and sprouted and put forth blossoms. And there came a small red fruit, hard as a withered apple." She paused, then concluded impressively, "And father says, before any man marries Zip'rah, he'll have to tear that tree from the ground."

"And has no one done so?" asked Moses.

" 'Course not. If any should touch it," she quoted in a deep voice, "he will be shriveled. For it is the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and no man can lay hold on it."

"And has any one ever died?" smiled Moses.

"N-no," said Tana, grudgingly. Then with a confident eagerness, "No one comes near it. Not even halfway. There was a plainsman last year who made eyes at Zip'rah. But when father told him about the tree, you should have watched his face. We never saw him again. So you'd better be careful."

Moses promised. "But you'll let me have a look at it, Tana. Thank you for the warning—and for the tale. You're a born story-teller. And this?" He pointed to the group of houses in front of them.

"Home," cried Tana, and danced him in.

TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

1

Jethro mumbled the prayer after food and pushed aside the last of the grain and honey cakes. The girls removed the wooden platters and brought in earthen bowls of spring water in which a verbena blossom floated.

"Tana, you little scamp!" Jethro shook a mock-menacing finger. "You should wait a week or two before you court our guest with flowers."

The smile was general except for Tana who, without an effort to reply to the raillery, burst into tears and ran into the garden.

"A queer child," said Jethro, turning to Moses. "Her mother was much the same. Women," he made an expansive gesture, "women are what they are, and neither man nor marriage can change them. It's not wise to blame any one, but every religion agrees that the gods concentrated on man and created woman as an after-thought. That accounts, I am sure, for her instability, and for her opposition to man's orderly processes of thought. Lacking his ability to shape life in any sort of symmetry, she destroys his patterns—his mental security, first of all—with

a series of emotional assaults. Unconscious, perhaps, but none the less devastating. And so, in the end, man is victimized by a set of intuitions which he distrusts and in whose validity he does not even believe. Have you not found it so?"

"I do not wish to pose as a prig," said Moses, "but I really know nothing of women. I used to be a priest."

"Quite so. I had forgotten. You will pardon an old man's rambling generalities. I am alone much of the time except for my bevy," he indicated the girls in the alcove, "and the mind is its own amusement. I forget how tiresome it can be to the young and active. Forgive me."

"Please—" Moses' gesture was deprecating but direct.

"So you intend to live in the country?" said Jethro. "Odd coincidence. My children may have told you that I, too, was a priest. It is so. I once had the honor of carrying a small statue of Istar to the great Amenophis from the King of Midian—and now I am, as you see, a rustic of sorts. A bucolic atheist, so to speak. But let us return to our muttons. You want to become a shepherd. My daughter Zipporah informs me you are an Egyptian."

"On my mother's side," said Moses, and then, after a moment's hesitation which he overbalanced with a rush, "I neglected to tell her that my father was a Hebrew."

Jethro appeared unaware of either the omission or the stammer. He merely nodded and continued, "I number several Hebrews among my best friends. You have, if I may say so, no trace of their accent; yet something in your eyes— You are sure you want to herd sheep?"

"Positive," replied Moses. "I did not suspect it yesterday; I knew it this morning. Unalterably. I was guided here. It was the hand of God."

"Having done a priest's service, I, like you, have come to love the animals that do not cajole the heavenly ones with prayer and sacrifice. But you speak again, as you did at the table, of 'God.' Have you found one you can truly believe in, with head as well as heart? I would like to know, for I still have a hankering after faith. I miss the idols I have smashed; yet I cannot restore them. I long for the gods—any god—that I never can return to. But once more I impose on your patience. To have to listen to the host's vagaries is heavy payment for a light meal. Let us examine the matter in hand. You were of service to my daughters this morning and I am no more ungrateful than they. But it is not only out of gratitude that I speak. You wish to be a shepherd; I need such a man. Most of the workers are in the fields—those who haven't gone off to be mercenaries in the armies. The labor is easy if the hours are not. You will be provided with food and lodging and," he looked keenly at the silent man, "a certain measure of companionship. If you need more to content you—"

"I am content," said Moses. "Will you show me your garden?"

Jethro's black eyes narrowed and he ran two fingers vaguely through his graying beard. Then he laughed. "Tana has been telling tales. Of course, it's only a myth, or a scrap of one—Hebrew in origin, by the bye—but the child loves it. Besides," his brow wrinkled and his fingers grew more active, "there may be something in the legend. The ancients often concealed truths in parables. I mean something symbolic, of course, nothing more. And the berries *are* unknown in this part of the world. It's not a tree of any dimensions—more like a bush in fact—and yet I feel it will stand for some time."

Moses could no longer appear unconscious of the scrutiny. His eyes were as level and clear as his voice.

"I would be the last to disturb a legend," he said, "especially one so deep-rooted. Besides," he added with a broadening smile, "I am determined to be a shepherd, not an agriculturist. The sheep-folds, I take it, are on the side of the hill above the house. One of your daughters will point out the pastures?"

"Let me show you," said Jethro, and rose. The two men stood shoulder to shoulder. They went out together.

2

Autumn came only as rumor in Midian. Bushes wore their leaves a trifle wearily, the young gold went out of the green, the morning haze lasted an hour longer and uncovered a sky in which the films of melting air hardened into porcelain. The birds were less vocally eager, the conies more confident. The sheep, Moses noticed, moved with a heavy unwillingness to the upper pastures. That was all. Four months had taught him something, he reflected, of the ways of sheep. Zipporah was still a mystery to him, and Jethro, while no longer openly suspicious, knew, somehow, everything of his days except his thoughts.

The sheep were scarcely a problem. He had divided his flock in three parts. First the younglings were led to the open field and allowed to nibble the new grass. The ewes and half-grown lambs came next and fed on the tough herbs and spears of timothy. Lastly the rams and older animals were driven forth and these browsed on the harder shoots, budding poplars and butterfly-weed. Noon

found them munching together. Moses could then turn to his grazing mind.

It fed on all it beheld, all it remembered. Every morning was contained in this morning; past and present converged here; self-searching forgot itself in the outspoken sun. Half-questions, bubbles of thought, rounded themselves and were dissipated in the light. Where was 'Nophis now? Living out his abnegation in some cranny of the world? Or a forgotten heap of ashes? Had he, Moses, ever wanted to be Pharaoh? Bialim, Ay, Thebes, Ti were sounds that ran together. Even Egypt was the ghost of another life, a ghost that had no reality in these peace-smelling meadows. Only the faces of the Hebrews remained without blurring. The lined parchment that was Nath looked at him from a broken rock; the dark cloud of Aaron's brow was always in the shadowed crotch of that cedar. My people! he thought with fading sarcasm. A stubborn people, even the children's eyes said it, a strong people. They needed nothing but a leader, were waiting for one. One who was of their blood yet superior to them; one who—

Mad speculation! Would this dream of leadership never die? How deep, under what choked springs did that craving run? The thought trickled, turned, was swept away in the rush of a warmer current. Zipporah. Round about and round about, like the children's game. 'Nophis and Egypt and Zipporah. Jethro and Tana and Zipporah. The past, the future, night and day, and Zipporah. And so to the dead center of the spinning circle. Zipporah.

Life was simplified at last. Here was a meaning without equivocation. But the language, thought Moses, is baffling. At times he seemed to understand it instinctively;

at other times its every syllable was sealed against him. He might grow to comprehend its contradictions, its erratic moods and tenses; he never would be able to speak it. Love. At the sound the word made in his brain, the blood shook and his tongue flew to the roof of his mouth. And Zipporah? Did she know the speech better than he? Tana was voluble with it. But Zipporah's eyes met his in full frankness; coquetry was not in her; the hand never fluttered at meeting. Could Zipporah be waiting? Like the Hebrews—?

Curse such a malingering mind! Here it was late afternoon and the sheep still to be herded together, for they were to be dipped this evening. Moses began to count the flock. He counted them again. Yes, there was one missing; a kid that had just been weaned. It must have wandered toward the sweet-grass between the thicket and the drying brook. Moses thought of the wolf he had pursued with stones and again cursed all thinking. He ran, throwing his weight against the tangle of briars, kicking his way through snares of bindweed. There, a miniature cloud on a pool of moss, lay the kid asleep. Moses picked it up and started back, carrying the willing bundle across his shoulders. Voices on the other side of the thicket made him stop. He recognized Tana's treble at once. It was fully a minute before he realized that the passionate and trembling voice was Zipporah's.

"You shouldn't say such things, you spoiled child," it declared.

"Child indeed!" cried Tana. "Father says I'm more grown up at eleven than most girls twice my age. And not half so spoiled as you! The way you make eyes at him—at the table, in front of every one, and in the road, going

out of your way and making it look like an accident."

"I don't," protested Zipporah, hotly.

"You do," rejoined Tana, adding with jealous spite, "and what do you know of him? A man you met at the well!"

"Don't be so nasty, Tana. You're as much in love with him as I am. Besides," she went on with the dreaminess of one speaking a thought nursed in secrecy, "didn't Rebekah meet her husband Isaac while drawing water for him? And didn't Jacob first see Rachel while she was watering her sheep?"

"You've been listening to his Hebrew fairy-tales," broke in Tana. "Did he tell you the one about Abraham, too, who turned away from his wife to Hagar the Egyptian?"

"You *are* hateful, Tana." Then, in a conciliating tone, "Come, let's not spoil the day with bickering."

But Tana held stubbornly to her mood. "It's you who are bickering. I'm only answering you. Besides, if he really wanted you, he'd say something. Or," she added with mischievous malice, "do something. But he won't touch the tree. Don't hope for it. Every time I tell him the story or point out the place, he smiles and says, 'Who am I to repeat Adam's error and lose a sure Eden for uncertain knowledge?' So you see you're wrong, Zip'rah."

"I see," said Zipporah, but her voice was curiously untroubled. Moses could not see her face but he knew it was smiling. He shifted the weight of the lamb to his right shoulder and went back to reassemble the flock.

3

Evening sounds. Distant baaing of tired sheep; occasional creak and rumble of a cart; a cock challenging the

world with inopportune vigilance. Evening smells. The hot sweetness of drying hay; thin intrusion of some weed; faint persistence of sweated cattle. Look of evening. White horizons; windless boughs; birds no longer playing in arcs and side-swoops, but aiming straight for distant branches.

Evening. Jethro's garden, an overgrown orchard, took twilight in as though it were an element to grow on. The tree, Moses perceived, had not changed in the four months since Tana had first showed him its heavy buds. But its expression had altered. It was not an impressive height —scarcely more than a straightened thorn-bush—but two of its boughs flung out in a gesture that Moses had come to regard as half-menacing, half-mocking. Tonight it looked positively derisive. Moses put his palm against the bark. It was as unwrinkled as a snake and its sticky smoothness gave him the same instinctive revulsion. Ashamed of his shrinking flesh, he put one hand hard on the slender trunk. Something trembled. Moses could not tell whether it rose from the stem or ran out of his arm. Shame purged itself in anger. Moses put his other hand about the slim body of the tree. The fingers met.

. . . . . .

Tana brought in the milk and cinnamon pudding, placing it before her father.

"Sit down, child," said Jethro, a bit testily. "The meal is ruined as it is. I've never known Moses to be so late. It's quite dark. One of the men had better be sent to look and see if anything has happened at the dipping-troughs."

"I'll go," said Zipporah, ignoring Tana's sniff of disdain. "I've finished anyway."

Without waiting for further consent, she got up and

walked with impatient leisure to the door. A gasp, telling Jethro she had stopped, made him turn abruptly on his stool. Moses filled the doorway, dragging something through it. Zipporah stared at him as though he had been transformed into something fabulous. But Moses, his eyes set, strode into the room, oblivious to all but Jethro, thrusting the thing before him like a spear.

"There," he said, "there's your tree with only a few of the roots missing. It can be transplanted if you wish. But if you want to do me a favor—"

"What is it, you madman?" shouted Jethro.

"Give me the main branch. I want to keep it for a staff," said Moses evenly, "and for a reminder."

"Anything else?" Jethro frowned at him. "Why do you hesitate? This house, perhaps? Or will you uproot the whole orchard? Speak your mind."

"I thought you'd know," said Moses with a stammer. "Tana's story . . . The tree . . . Zipporah . . ."

"Of course I know," laughed Jethro. "We all know. And we've been wondering how much longer it would take you to tell us. Even Zipporah— But I must not betray a daughter's confidences. She will tell you herself, won't you, Zipporah? What! Where has she gone to, the bashful rabbit?"

"Bashful nothing!" interrupted Tana. "She ought to be ashamed of herself—waiting in the garden like that. And of course he's gone after her! The hypocrite—she pretends she's surprised. See? And Moses— Oh! O father, they're hateful!" She threw herself on Jethro's breast with a pitiful sob, "I don't want to look at them."

Jethro could not comfort her.

MARRIAGE

1

Five years in Midian, Moses lived wholly through his senses. Each year another sense nourished and drained him. For a while, the mere taste of every morning was enough. Later the smell of gathering night, so like the musk of her hair, was almost too much. To hear Zipporah's voice rush incoherently to him in the dark was to know how the light hailed God, leaping out of nothingness. To see the answering limbs rise and relax was to see creation twisting, melting and forming itself again. To touch the hidden places of her body was to explore an always fresh and unfamiliar world. The past no longer existed; the future would be an unsatiable extension of today. There was only the burning, inexhaustible present. Thought was a shadow floundering among shades. Energy alone was real. Life coiled, stood erect, and liberated itself through his loins . . .

And so for another twelvemonth.

2

Six years, thought Moses, watching his flock scattered over the hill like shaggy, gently breathing rocks. The animals were his now. In six years, he reflected, as he half-consciously counted the lot, much had happened about him, little within him. Jethro, regarding him with something between indulgence and respect, gave him complete authority; more so since the ex-priest of Istar was frequently absent "on state affairs," his broad mysteriousness discouraging further inquiry. Tana had married soon after Zipporah, a runaway affair with a Hittite mercenary. She had said good-by to no one but her father and in answer to Zipporah's cross-examination, had replied, "Why should I love him? That's no good for a girl—unless she wants to be miserable. He's mad about me, he asks no questions, and he's strong." No one, as far as Moses knew, had heard from Tana. Until lately, he hadn't thought of her since the brief tempest of her departure. He had had quieter things to occupy him. There was a son, Gershom, a willful, savage replica of himself. Everything was changing so gradually he had not noticed how much he, too, had changed with each alteration. He roused the bellwether, driving him toward the trough. The others got up awkwardly, hunching along as stones might move. Change had come to everything.

Everything. Even Zipporah. Where was that ecstasy now? Where was the radiance that shone if she only lifted a bowl of meal from the table? Where was the happy communion that sent him running back with a strange flower to show, pulling her into the twilight to look at a queer

cloud or to listen and name a bird by its call? Where? he inquired of the dusk with a desperate sense of loss. Zipporah was good, she was dependable as daily bread. She was like bread, concluded Moses, bread warmed over after a holiday. The smell of milk was always about her, pleasing but not provocative. In spite of their most intimate caresses, she had grown reserved. Without denying him, she tried to repudiate herself. In the morning while dressing, she would often turn her back to him as though ashamed of her part in last night's abandonment. She accepted his ardors without a cry, without a word. She invented no untried endearments, called forth no new excesses. Her body, like her responses, had grown tame.

The boy was his own flesh, a wild thing. He would be a trouble to himself, Moses reflected, driving back a gluttonous milch-yoe. The thoughts came at him all afternoon, like persistent buzzards waved away only to gather in greater numbers. What would become of the boy if he were to die, or return to Egypt?

Moses gasped and let one of the sheep escape from the dipping-trough. It was the first time that the possibility of leaving Midian had come into his waking thought. He realized that, for some weeks, he had been dreaming of his boyhood in Thebes, of crowded streets, of the clash of ideas, of men and minds in action. Zipporah was like this milch-yoe; she would never lift her eyes from earth; she would stay here forever. She was quietly content and mistook his lustihood for happiness. Flesh had betrayed him; it was no longer the complete fulfillment. Flesh was a bait and domesticity the hook. A gust of resentment ran through him as he shouted at the ungainly wethers and drove them all into the wooden tanks. He watched the

frightened creatures scramble out of the water, stupider than ever, and suddenly looked at them with disgust.

Six years to grow like them! Six years to tend hoggs in heat, to keep maggots from breeding in filth-caked fleece. Six years, he said to himself. But not seven . . .

3

Jethro rubbed his nose with a meditative finger.

"Now that you are assured of no eavesdroppers, suppose, my dear, you tell me exactly what has happened?"

"But, father, I've told you over and over that nothing has happened."

"Nothing?" The concern lurking in Jethro's heavy brows declared itself more emphatically. "That makes it harder. Now if he only beat you occasionally or refused to consider your feminine limitations or neglected you for weeks, we'd soon know which of you is finding marriage longer and less exciting than it promised to be. Not even a serious quarrel?"

"Not even a trivial one," replied Zipporah. "Moses is goodness itself. It isn't anything he does or says that worries me, father; it's what he's stopped doing and saying. When we were first married, he asked nothing for himself; now no matter where he is, he is restless and riddled with moods. Formerly, he had me take his midday meal to the near pastures so as to be with him; now he goes to the furthest fields and takes his meal cakes along. He used to talk about everything hours at a time; nothing was too small for his attention. He made me see the things I had looked at since childhood—hills, sunsets, animals—with new eyes, as though they had been created in

a world that never existed before he came. Now he doesn't want to speak about anything, not even Gershom. And I can't leave him alone *all* the time!"

Jethro's eyes were grave. "I see. Anything else where you notice a change?"

"No." Zipporah paused. "I can't think of any definite—" Then with a rush of color. "You remember how, when he pulled up the tree, you said he was stronger than —well, you said any stallion. At first I thought so too. And he was always so—young." She looked away from her father. "He has grown older, lately; much older, and I don't know why. He seems always tired. Unnaturally tired." She finished awkwardly. "I suppose that's what worries me most."

"H'm'm. Let me think." Jethro's was a calculating silence. "How long have you and Moses been married?"

"Nearly seven years."

"And Moses must be about thirty-four now."

"Thirty-five and a month over."

"H'm'm." The silence was longer, the smile more gradual. "You must be patient, Zipporah. You tell me Moses doesn't want to talk about his past, but I've an idea he's thinking about it—and his future also. The two may not be so widely separated. Yes, my dear Zipporah," he replied to the questioning eyebrows, "I've heard things on my recent journeys. And I've had a most interesting conversation with the old Egyptian who swore he knew my son-in-law, but whom Moses refused to recognize. A *most* edifying conversation; two of them, in fact. Something may come of it. But it won't do to precipitate matters. A muddle will help nobody. And Moses will have to come to grips with himself first—and by himself."

Then, seeing Zipporah's bewildered expression, Jethro continued, "Forgive me, my child, for growing enigmatical. At my time of life, you know—"

"Father," Zipporah interrupted sternly, "the early fifties are not advanced enough to be an excuse for obscurity."

Jethro laughed sheepishly. It was a relief to exchange the parental for the childish rôle. "You're right; I plead guilty as usual. What's the use of being a father when his daughters always see through him so easily! Which reminds me," he hurried on, "we couldn't get much further with our conversation in any event, for I expect your sister."

"Tana? You can't mean it? When?"

"One of my men passed a small detachment of Hittites on the march yesterday. He recognized Tana and her husband. If his calculations are correct, they ought to be here within an hour or two."

"And you've said nothing about it all the while we've sat here, waiting till the last minute to tell me! Will no man ever know that houses don't make themselves ready for guests? Oh—!" Zipporah simulated anger remarkably, springing to her feet.

"Now, now," said Jethro, "forgive an old man his infirmities." He cowered in mock alarm. "Well, fifty *is* a decrepit age. Wait and see. Meanwhile," with a graver kindliness, "take your time, my child. Go a little easier in this as in all else. You may need your strength for something harder than getting things ready—I mean for letting things wait. No, no, I don't suggest anything serious or immediate. Just a doddering generality, the sort you'll find on the lips of fathers and fourth-rate philos-

ophers. The old— Oh, run on, my dear. I know I'm hopeless. Run on. Isn't that Moses' step?"

4

It was at the conclusion of a tense supper that the grunting of camels and the shouting of carriers announced the Hittites. The fiber curtain was snatched aside and Tana flung in, pushing her husband before her with less gayety than bravado.

"Good health and appetite to all within these walls," she quoted irreverently. "Sorry we interrupted. You all remember Ishbal, don't you? He's not much changed except that he has less teeth and more fat. You're looking well, Zip'rah, like the mother of a royal litter. Father," she threw herself in his arms, "it's good to be home again. Wish I could stay here."

"Why don't you, my child?" said Jethro, his arm about her. "With your husband's permission." Tana snorted, while Ishbal looked uncomfortably at his feet. "And aren't you going to say good evening to Moses?"

"Good evening, Moses," repeated Tana with the lifeless accents of an obedient child. "No, thanks," this to Zipporah, who had drawn up a chair, "we had milk, dates and citron an hour ago. But you sit down, Ishbal. Eating is the one thing he does well. He never can say anything stupid when his mouth is full."

Ishbal grinned as if he had made an excellent joke at some one else's expense, and broke bread with a suspiciously short prayer.

"Just a bite, darling," urged Jethro, "a little of the black honey. You always used to be so fond of that."

"Thanks, father, but I couldn't. The excitement will give me indigestion enough. But the rest of you please go on. I'll sit here and amuse myself with my thoughts and Ishbal's table manners."

She sat, half in lamplight, half in shadow, against a shelf of copper utensils. A burnished plate was a nimbus about her tawny hair, which, Moses noticed, she wore shorter and wilder than when a child. She must be almost nineteen now, he thought, the mouth is fuller, the head higher, the little V between the eyes has a more mocking slant.

Then their eyes met. It was Moses who looked away first. He had glimpsed for an unveiled moment what he did not care to see. It had no name; he could not have said whether it was Tana's unhappiness or his own restlessness. But confession spoke there, and confirmation. And, more than all, response. Bits of the sunken past bobbed up: a challenging phrase of Tana's; her frank, unchildish invitation; the hurt unconcealed in the quick rise and fall of her breasts. He watched them now. They were not quiet. What a fool he had been! What a blind fool! And now—

He realized, from the expectant stillness, that some one must have asked him a question. Zipporah repeated it.

"Don't you think he looks just like you?"

Moses guessed they had been talking of Gershom. The room was unusually hot. "Oh—exactly," he said. And then, to Tana, "You have no children?" He was angry at himself for stuttering.

"No," replied Tana calmly. "We have not been so blessed." Ishbal coughed over his cakes.

How long would they sit there, thought Moses. Would no one change the subject?

"And how did you enjoy Khatti?" Jethro asked, as though in league with him.

"We never got that far," said Tana.

"I couldn't help it, could I?" asked Ishbal, appealing to the table. "You see, when we left Midian—"

"Oh, don't bother to explain it all over again," interrupted Tana. "It's our favorite quarrel. The trouble with Ishbal is that he's not a soldier, as he thinks, but a hired man. He goes where he's told, and that's never where he intends going. Nor I, for that matter. But it's really my own fault. I used to say a girl shouldn't marry the man she's in love with. Then I realized it's just as bad to marry a man you don't love. You lose either way."

"Well," said Zipporah with a puzzled frown, "I don't know just what you mean. But," her brow cleared, "I'm sure that the wise men were right when they said love *and* marriage are the foundations of the home."

"You're lucky to have both, Zip'rah," said Tana, "but you always were lucky. Wasn't she, Moses?"

Jethro saved him. "Come, children," he motioned, "come out and look at the last of the moon. Tana, this is no time to undermine the basis of our social system. I wish, sometimes, you'd forget that you were my daughter. It would be better for both of us. Out with you—all of you. Ah! Still a shining finger-nail! Tomorrow night it will be black."

5

Black it was, and, except for five untwinkling points, starless. Everything but their anguish was blotted out. It lived in two voices.

"You must go back now, Moses."

"I'll never go back. I won't leave you."

"You must." There was a silence. "Then I'll have to leave you."

"You can't. I've found you at last—we've found each other. There's no turning back from that."

"There is for me. And there will be for you. It's the night and maybe the ghost of what might have been."

"It's not the night, Tana. The night has no power. Its stars are cold. And no noonday ever burned in me like this. Nor a ghost. If a spirit were to feel this fire, even for a second, he would be smoke that is spent. Why fight against it? You know what it is, Tana."

"Don't name it, Moses. Don't call on the god, and you won't be disappointed when he doesn't appear."

"Very well then. Know it without words. Feel it. Here! Tana!"

The silence accepted the small sounds. A low cry splintered it.

"No! No! You're not thinking, Moses. Think now. It's been beautiful. I've loved you ever since you first walked the hill with the child that was me. Before that—when you rose up behind the well like a prince in a fairy-tale. But this is life, Moses. We can't escape it by running away. You have work to do; and unless father and I are wrong, work among men."

He was silent. The mad blaze began to lower. He had not heard her last words, but the inflection was enough. In those accents he could hear Zipporah, a younger, more ardent Zipporah, waking him. And there was Gershom. And yet—

"But if you go, what will you do, Tana?"

"See the world, and what it's made of, Moses. So will you. We may meet again—even in Aethiopia."

"Aethiopia?" The name was a dream pronounced. It came, like so much of his recent thinking, colored with Egypt; the sound of slaves was in it, the mechanical drone of priests listing tributes.

"Why not? Ishbal's company takes service there. No woman of Midian has ever ventured that far. I've decided to go."

"But, Tana, is there no way—? Listen, Tana—"

But she had leapt into the darkness, and was lost. Moses walked on, smoldering. The fire had not spent itself, but it no longer shot up within him. Once before it had burned so. That, too, was a night of fire. Suddenly, as though he had not forgotten for seven years, he thought of 'Nophis, the slain Egyptian, the Hebrews . . .

Zipporah was in the road waiting for him.

"I was worried about you. You're later than usual and the night is so dark," she added with only a shade more than her usual concern. "But it was foolish to fear. I knew you'd come back."

A BURNING BUSH

1

The Hittites left the next morning, Jethro accompanying them to the toll-gate at Abbadi. That same noon Moses took his flock up the slope of the small mountain known as Horeb. The sun burned steadily in the brazier of the sky. There was no cloud, no motion among the hot grass, yet the air was intermittently cooled by the sound of a light wind. It was, Moses discovered ruefully, only a shower of bird-song.

He was glad Tana had gone. No, gladness was not what had brought him to himself. Relief, perhaps. Or a knowledge of forces forgotten but still waiting in him. Unused forces, powers to command, destinies to change, peoples to lead . . . To lead? The old wish. Would it never be disentangled from his bones? He started climbing the zigzag path, driving the sheep as last night's dream came between him and the summit.

It began, in his dream, just after Tana had torn out of his arms. He could still feel the ache of that rupture, smell the vanishing fragrance of her body and see the trail of her going as one sees the path of a shooting-star after it

has gone. All, at the beginning of his dream, was as it actually had been except for the sheep. His flocks were about him, but enormously increased; their numbers stretched up and down the hills. Every rock had risen on four feet and was waiting his word. The night was still black, but it, too, grew animate. It flowed about him; it was a pool in which tree-toads threw ripples of bells. Then he noticed that the sheep had human faces—there were thousands upon thousands of them—and the faces were not those with which he was familiar. They were neither Egyptian nor Midian. They were the faces of the crowd in the Hebrew quarter, old-eyed, imploring, eager. He recognized the undersized rock-breaker, the harassed orator, the stern one they called Aaron. He remembered trying to count them, remembered his pride and despair as he watched them multiply under his eyes. He called to Zipporah to help, and it was Tana who stood beside him. Yet he did not want to make love to her now. He wanted only to tell her that he had come into his kingdom. "They are my people," he cried to her, waving his staff which was now a scepter. "There is nothing they cannot do, nowhere they will not follow me. They wait only for the word."

"What word?" Tana had asked. What word, indeed? He did not know. He began looking for it everywhere. The bushes twisted themselves into hieroglyphics; the grasses climbed over his legs in Hebrew characters; the stars rearranged themselves in Syrian. But the word was nowhere to be found. He ran, stumbling through labyrinths of sky, down blind alleys of space. "The Word! The Word!" he had shouted, "The Word! . . ." until Zipporah had to rouse him from his nightmare.

The Word, thought Moses now, as he reached the summit and allowed the flock to scatter. It was late afternoon. The sun, not yet lost in mist-gathering, was almost on a level with his eyes. A large, ripe wind blew tamarisks and Arabian resin haphazardly. A naked thorn-bush had lost its few five-pointed leaves. The dream would not dissolve; instead of melting in daylight, it formed itself with greater clarity than in the dark.

When Moses looked up, the sun was immediately behind the thorn-bush, a ball of fire caught in black branches. A thin red scarf of cloud wavered about the upper twigs like blowing tongues of flame. The bush was burning, but it was not consumed.

Burning, thought Moses, dropping his rod, as I have burned; like all the world with its repressed heat and sudden blaze; continually burning, yet never burned out. I will see this great sight, thought Moses, and understand how this skeleton of a bush, stark and sapless, sharing death with the moon, can anoint its cold ribs with so much life. I will know how the least of plants can hold the God.

God. The Word. The word made flesh. It spoke from the fiery bush; it woke within him. The sun dazzled, but he would not shield his eyes. It was Akhnaton, it was Akhnaton's God, his God. It spoke and he replied. As though disembodied, he heard himself answering his doubts; a universe away, he listened to the two inner voices conducting their soundless dialog.

"Moses, Moses."

"Here am I."

"What do you fear?"

"Myself. Everything. The Pharaoh that keeps me from

the throne. The warfare in my blood. The brown snake in the grass. Because of these, I have run away."

"You must conquer those fears."

"How?"

"Know yourself. Obey yourself. Lead yourself."

"But I want to lead others."

"That will come next. Deliver yourself before you attempt to rescue a kingdom. Egypt can wait."

"Egypt is nothing to me. It is a dying land and a dead people. Even Akhnaton could not bring it out of the tomb. I see no hope there."

"Where then?"

"Where indeed?"

"You know well enough. Why conceal your thoughts from yourself? Why do you hesitate to name your brothers in affliction? Have you not heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, and having known it, can you be free of their sorrow?"

"It is true. I have no rest because of them and what I might accomplish. The Hebrews are an older and a younger people, long-suffering and yet arrogant. I am their son—I would be their father. If I cannot be Pharaoh, by ruling them I will be greater than he."

"How?"

"I would deliver them out of the bonds of the Egyptians and bring them to a larger land, a good land flowing with milk and honey. I would lead them against the Hittites and the Amorites until they came to the land of Canaan. . . . But again my fear holds me. Who am I that I should go before Pharaoh and the Hebrews with equal authority?"

"You are a prince and a prophet of Israel."

"A prince, perhaps. But a prophet? In whose behalf?"

"Your God's."

"Which God?"

"The same God you and 'Nophis have always known. The revealed invisible God that was Aton and is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

"And his name?"

"Is legion. You knew him as Ra-Horakhti once. Then as Aton. Then Adonis. Then Adonai. The syllables change; the spirit is constant. But call him nothing; give him no name."

"No name? No sign? And am I to triumph where Akhnaton failed? Am I to give nothingness a shape? A form without an image, a God without a name? How can a falterer ask others to have faith?"

"You will not falter and they will believe. They will turn against you, yet they will believe."

"Again the fear. I will come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has called me and sent me to give you power.' And they will say, 'What is his name?' What can I answer?"

"Answer: I am that I am. Say *I Am*—the impulse of life has sent me. That which was, is, and always will be. The seen and unseen: the oak folded in the acorn, the lightning sleeping in the clouds. That which helps the slenderest root dig a path even through the rock, and beats as surely in the smallest pulse as in the waste of tides. The least labor of the mouse no less than the huge business of the sun."

"These are the affairs of elements. What has such a force to do with compassion? What is man that Omnipotence is mindful of him?"

"Is man so ignoble that he rejects his heritage? Is he less than the weed for whom the sun is punctual and every season is sure?"

"Man is divine, not a shifting reflection of divinity. I have always affirmed it. But what will establish it? I cannot. I am not eloquent."

"Your deeds will speak."

"My tongue is slow to define what the heart declares."

"The mouth is always readier for lies than for truth. But I will be at your lips and teach you what to say."

"I cannot. I cannot. It is too great a burden. Let some one else lift it. Some one without distrust, without self-reproach."

"Coward. Do you repudiate what you have loved? Do you turn your back on all that struggle toward light?"

"No. No. In the name of 'Nophis and my deepest self, no. I do not deny my God. Man *is* divine. And I accept my godhood. I will go to Egypt. I will redeem my brothers. By what means, in what manner, I do not know. It must unfold. I will bring them up out of their afflictions. I will lead them into a new land, the land of Canaan. I will know my God and I will not fear."

The two voices that had spoken with the wordlessness of winds stopped as a wind stops, and Moses came back to his body. He was in sole possession now. The sun had gone out of the branches; only a seeping of light lay at the roots. The evening star seemed premature. Time to bring the flocks down, thought Moses, and took a step toward them.

He stopped abruptly. Less than a yard from him lay a long, brown snake, the poisonous sort that rumor assigned to this mountain, but which he had seen only in

smooth flight. The horror of crawling things assailed him; the old nausea, older than childhood, was emphasized at sight of the reptile's length. To run was impossible. Nothing but the peak behind. And in front of him, the serpent, without betraying its motion, had advanced a foot. He stooped for a rock. Somewhere within him a sentence shaped itself: "I will know my God and I will not fear."

The rock remained in the road. Moses took one swift step and seized the serpent by the tail. It was his shepherd's staff, the brown branch he had torn from Jethro's tree of knowledge. Moses laughed, remembered dropping the rod. "So that was my terror! Well, I have grasped it with my hands at last." He held the rod up like a sword. "With this fear I will conquer fear. Even in Egypt."

He sang himself down the hill, shouting to his flock like the head of an army.

2

Jethro was waiting for him at the cross roads. Moses spoke first.

"I have a surprise for you, father-in-law," he said.

"Good," replied Jethro. "A fair exchange. I have one for you. But tell me first, should you meet an old acquaintance under my roof, would you refuse to recognize him again?"

"Jethro," he looked sharply at the man, but, discovering nothing to aid him, finished lamely, "I suspect you of plotting."

"Moses," answered the other, "I suspect you of hiding your plotting. But every man to his business—especially if he's an Egyptian. Or a Hebrew. Or both."

"Jethro, what's the meaning of your riddle?"

"Oh, go along in. The answer is sitting down, waiting for you."

It was Ay. He was browner and more shriveled than any monkey Moses had ever seen, but the hand he raised heavenward was firm as ever. He began bowing, but Moses stopped the salutation with a large embrace. When he was free, Ay pointed to Jethro and said,

"Don't blame him, Prince—I mean, Moses. I've been at him ever since I tracked you down. We've been conspir—er—conferring together lately. The Queen Mother was right. She knew you couldn't forget, that it was only a matter of time before you'd come back. And you will—won't you?"

"I will come back."

"Aton be praised. And it's high time. Egypt is in its worst days. Only you can save it, Prince—er—Moses."

"Ay, let there be no misunderstanding. It rejoices my heart to see you. But I am not coming back to save Egypt; I am going to destroy it."

Ay smiled tolerantly. "That doesn't matter," he said, "as long as you're coming."

RETURN

1

Toward the end of supper, the awkward pauses had grown until Zipporah, leaving her curds and comfit, rose.

"You men have so much to say to each other that I'd only be in the way. But please," she turned to Ay with a banter that scarcely hid her anxiety, "don't persuade him to be an Egyptian priest again. I see little enough of him as it is. And those priests—!" She left on a rising note.

"A charming woman. And an excellent wife, I'm sure. Do you plan to take her with you?"

"Of course." The reply was unenthusiastic but definite. "Why not?"

"Well, things there are not exactly conducive to sightseeing, or even to quiet domestic life."

"There are reasons why I cannot leave my wife at present—one reason, at any rate. There may be another child."

"Of course, travel is safe," Ay said soothingly, "but in Egypt—"

Jethro flung out a hand. "Moses has enforced a strict taboo against the mention of Egypt. I've even had to refer

to Palestinian cotton when every one knew I meant Egyptian. Possibly I exaggerate"—this in acknowledgment of a gesture from Moses—"but if I hadn't maintained a camel-driver who never carried anything but news, any one here would guess that Amenophis was still on the throne. So do tell him, Councilor, what has been happening in the seven years he's been trying to evade himself. Come. Bring that jug closer to you."

Ay resembled nothing so much as an exhumed mummy as he shifted the stool and began:

"I needn't tell you of the Queen-Mother's death. Not a year after you reached Midian, the great Ti, consort of the most magnificent of Pharaohs, wisest of her sex—"

"Please!" said Moses. And Ay, seeing his expression, hurried on.

"Civil war came soon after, as she predicted. Four years of it. Shakhara on his quaking throne in the Horizon; Bialim's priests lording it in Thebes. Horemheb's soldiers at first were all with Shakhara. But the man couldn't hold them. They knew he had no divinity from the start. When they found he had no humanity either, they began drifting north. They deserted by twos and threes, in squadrons, sometimes whole regiments. Then, about two years ago, old Bialim died, and Bialim, son of Bialim, launched his master-stroke. He had a huge wooden statue of Amen-Ra erected in the chief square at Thebes. You remember the ones with workable joints and rolling eyes? Well, this one had smoke issuing from its nostrils and green fire from its ears at night. And, whenever a crowd assembled, a brassy voice would promise eternal damnation to those who worshiped other gods and unreserved salvation for all who turned to Amen-Ra. To reënforce

the miraculous message, Bialim's priests put up placards and sent runners proclaiming a general amnesty to all who had been misled by the heretic, on condition that the City of the Horizon be deserted."

"One moment, Ay. I understand the method. But the phrases! The 'heretic'? Do they mean—?"

"Yes. That is one of the pleasantest of the terms. 'The criminal whose name itself is a sacrilege' is another. No one may refer to Akhnaton by sign or symbol. His title is being erased from all records; they have even cut the prohibited syllables from the sarcophagus and mummy-bands."

"Then they did find his body."

"They found *a* body," said Ay, "and that was enough for their purpose. But the living Akhnaton will not down. A caravan from Faad reports a wonder-working hermit on the eastern edge of the desert. A soldier, left for dead on the western battlefront, tells how he woke to find his wounds bandaged and sweet water beside him. A tribe of nomads burn their idols after the apparition of a strange spirit. And so the legend of Akhnaton grows."

"But Shakhara?"

"Oh," Ay smiled, "there is no doubt about *his* death. Bialim, son of Bialim, saw to that. It was his first official act. 'To insure the peace of upper and lower Egypt'—that is how the official message was worded."

"And now?"

"Now? Chaos in the name of law and order. Civil war abandoned on the surface; revolution seething underneath. Aton no longer worshiped anywhere, and Amen hated everywhere. But jealous Amen is triumphant. Bialim's policy was no compromise. His priests have proved that,

to keep a nation subjected, fear is a more potent force than love. Even the Pharaoh, poor boy, is a subject—in some ways the most pitiful of all."

"Here, too, Akhnaton was clairvoyant?"

"Yes. The lad Tutankhaton is the victim. After the offending syllable had been altered and the name 'restored' to Tutankhamen, the tool was ready for the priestly hand. The Pharaoh is twelve years old—and a more frightened-looking child I never want to see."

"But if a Pharaoh is on the throne, even though he is a figure-head, and Bialim's priests control the country, what do you hope for me to do? Rebuild the City of the Horizon?"

"Aton forbid. That curve of the Nile was never healthy. No, rebuild nothing. Take your own. Possess Thebes. Scatter the vultures. Reclaim Egypt."

"If I bring order out of chaos, it will not be for the sake of Egypt. Jethro may have told you of my father."

Ay looked at Jethro under quick eyelids, then back at Moses. "For your own sake, first. And I know no better instrument of revolt than the Hebrews. Their uprising would be a signal; others would join; the submerged masses would throw off the yoke of the priests, heavier now than any time on record. They will rally to you. The province of Goshen swarms with malcontents. Everything is ripe for action. Am I wrong, Jethro?"

Jethro had maintained an unusual silence during Ay's summary. Seated in the shadow, he had listened to Moses' monosyllables, watched his face which, in its very lack of expression, betrayed a controlled tensity. Jethro spoke.

"How far wrong you may be, Ay, not one of us here could say. Not tonight or next week or next sixmonth. In

two years, perhaps. Moses has said he will return to Egypt, and that must suffice. What the result of his homecoming will be and the number of its consequences is something no oracle would care to predict. I know only one certainty and that is this: My faith is in Moses, not in Egypt. I don't ask you to remember that," he continued, turning to Moses, "nor do I wish you to feel responsible for my interest. You won't have to. My agents are few but accomplished. They are one of the two factors I can depend on in this most undependable world. You, Moses, are the other. If ever you should need me, anywhere, anytime— But I will know. Dismiss it from your concern. And if," he looked steadily into the fixed eyes, "if ever circumstances are too difficult for Zipporah, remember her home is here. This, also, you can dismiss from your mind —at least until the time for memory. You have, I know, many other thoughts to occupy you now."

Moses stood up and, for the first time that evening, smiled at both men.

"Strangely enough, there is only one thought that has been churning about my brain for the last hour. And that thought is a phrase." The mouth was stone now. "It is the one sentence I have to say to Bialim, son of Bialim."

"And that is?"

"Let my people go!"

2

They passed the border the second week, saw the bright fields of Goshen in the dawn of the twentieth day, and entered the chief Hebrew settlement with night. Accustomed to silence fractured irregularly by sheep-bells or a voice

from the road, the noise of the small city seemed monstrous. Nostrils used to grass resented the discordance of smells that fought to dominate. The interiors of houses spilling into the streets, the odor of yesterday, over-ripe fruit, men and sour clay, wet wash, silt of the Nile, stink of an unburied crocodile, musts of beer, fumes of heated oil, rancid clothing. Most of all, the smell of cooking, so different from the farm kitchens of the Midianites. This was the smell of Hebrews, a sweet-sour smell.

"One more turn," said Ay, "and we'll enter the chief square. The women will look after your wife and child at once. The men will meet you. They have heard of your coming, but only their spokesmen will be present. There's a harmless old orator who threatens thunderbolts, but who wouldn't singe a dog's hair. And there's a quieter fellow, a lean, hook-nosed priest, who is a leader of sorts. He'll bear watching."

It was Aaron. He stood, a lean silhouette, before a column of brushwood fire.

"I would have known you anywhere," said Moses, "though that night I never expected to meet you again in this or any other world."

"We have not forgotten," said Aaron. "The ones who saw you have spread the story till it is as familiar as a street-cry. The children worship you; the young men look to you with a reverence they entertain for nothing else. As for the elders— But here," he indicated the group, "I am keeping you from them."

The half-dozen came forward, ointments on their curled beards.

"This," said Aaron, "is Hur, oldest of our council. He is from Judah. And this is the priest Nashon, son of

Amminadab, of the same tribe. This," bringing a half-blind veteran into the light, "is Pagiel, the son of Ocran. In conference Pagiel is shy as a plain girl and mute as a turtle, but in the field he is called 'The Lightning with One Eye.' He represents the tribe of Asher. Gad has sent Eliasaph, this red-haired road-maker. He supervised the building of the highway leading from Nefkep. This is our wise man, the magician Shelumiel, a Simeonite, son of the wonder-working Zurishaddai. This is our ferret—Ahira, son of Enan, of Naphtali. Only six of the tribes have sent their spokesmen. Others will follow in a few days. Their excuses are plausibly varied, but they could all be lumped under one: Hebrew caution. The others are waiting to know whether they should remain waiting. We are, as you may have discovered already, an adaptable race. Each tribe has its own symbolic animal, but none has adopted the beast which all of them resemble most: the chameleon. But here," he smote his brow with a reproachful hand, "I have forgotten Nath. He is our scribe and—"

"The orator, of course," said Moses. "It all comes back to me. It is as though a dream were more actual than actuality. Here I am in the last place that might have been predicted for me. Yet nothing is strange. It is as though, unaccountably and by contrary journeying, I had come home. Reality is curious, is it not, Nath?"

"It is more than reality, master. It is divination."

"Why do you call me master?"

"Because I know you for what you are. I knew you long before the physical eye could recognize you—or fail to, as it did that night."

"Know me—? How?"

"In a small way," said Nath, with a deprecating eleva-

tion of his palms, "I, too, am something of a seer. Perhaps," he fumbled in his sleeve, "you would care to read the vision I had of you before you came. It is called 'The Redeemer Rejects Heaven.' I did not know your name, but I knew your mission—and there could be no mistaking you."

"No?" smiled Moses.

"No," replied Nath with uncompromising gravity. "If you read the manuscript you will see—"

"Nath," interrupted Aaron, "you presume on our guest's time if not his patience. There is a season for poetry and such reflected pleasantries. But these are hours for deliberation, serious issues, possibly fatal decision. So keep your writings for a more propitious moment."

But Moses would not have it so. "It is many years since I have seen a poet," he said, "and he, too, was a visionary —even though they, not knowing it, set him on a throne. Before they could discover and reject him, his sense of divinity had taken him beyond their consciousness. No, Aaron, do not despise poetry. It is the vision, the imaginative world in which we all want to live, deny it though we may. The world we submit to, the world we think so real, is only the substitute where our five senses can display their limitations. As for reflections, Nath again has the best of it. A poem does not reflect life; it is life. It is the truth independent of the material. Let me have the manuscript."

"By all means," agreed Aaron. "Your journey has been long and our talk is prosy. And if Nath's story fails to amuse you, his rhetoric, I am told, is an excellent soporific."

During the presentation, Ay had kept silent in the background. He came forward now.

"If I may suggest," he said, "a continuance tomorrow would be better for everybody. It has been, as your prophet has just said, a long and monotonous journey, and Moses would be the last to complain. But I happen to know he has not slept more than a few hours for a fortnight. For the last three nights he has not even gone to bed, but has prolonged his prayers until morning sent us searching for him in the desert. You will understand why, though I dislike to take him from you, I am anxious for him to come."

"But I had hoped," interposed Aaron, "to have the honor of his company. In fact, I had prepared for it. My home is not luxurious, yet, I think," this directly to Moses, "you will be made comfortable. Besides, there is so much to be determined, so much need for more than occasional talks. I had hoped you would live among us, here, for a few days; better still, a few weeks. We would welcome—"

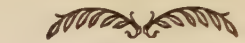
"He is right, Ay," said Moses. "I must know these people—my people—and I cannot do that as a visitor. I warned you, Ay, to expect nothing of one no longer guided by the star of Egypt. It may be only a coincidence that one flame has brought me to another. But the voice I heard in a burning bush speaks to me now from that pillar of fire." He pointed to the brushwood blaze. "And it tells me to remain."

"Never let me dissuade you from guidance or your choice of symbols," said Ay with pronounced courtliness. "May both protect you, Moses, until we meet again. And may that be soon." Ay went over to the patient camels as Aaron turned to Moses.

"Your highn—your—" he stopped, perplexed.

"My name is Moses, and yours is Aaron. A name is enough of a disguise; a title on top of it is as false—and absurd—as two masks. Shall we go?" The others automatically moved with them. "But what is this, Aaron?"

"That papyrus which you have forgotten," said Aaron, not ungently, "is Nath's manuscript."



THE REDEEMER

Moses read it next morning before Aaron was about. A she-goat was tethered a few feet from the door, resting familiarly beneath a sapling. Moses tugged at her udders, drew a scant cupful of the strong milk, and usurped her place.

It was a long manuscript. The style thundered; little happened. Nath was miserly with his plot, spendthrift with details and adjectives. Moses caught himself skipping paragraphs, anxious to discover what the Redeemer saw in Heaven and why he had rejected it. So far, he confessed to himself, he had not recognized his own likeness. Nevertheless he went on, the wild imaginings beginning to compensate for the uncertain form. Moses read:

And for the third time, the Redeemer declined the mission, crying to Jahveh: "Lord of Hosts and Emperor of Life, thou askest too great a thing, a thing beyond reason. I am thy servant, but how can I bring about that which thou thyself hast not accomplished? Hadst thou persuaded Egypt to forsake her evil ways when they first enslaved the Israelites, they might have heeded me. But now, after two hundred years of bondage, were I to speak of freedom, Pharaoh would answer, 'If a beast of burden

wander into my field and I use it for a number of years and its master knows of it and makes no protest, what right has his servant to object?' And I will know not what to reply, for his words would be just."

And Jahveh grew wroth with the Redeemer, and the thunder snarled at him, saying: "What dost thou know of justice? Canst judge between the spider and the fly? Did I summon thee to inquire which had the better claim: the fish-hawk or the fish? Did I ask thy leave to raise the cedar with slow fire from the sun or topple it with a lightning's breath? Thou pratest of justice. Thou knowest naught but words, and of these thou speakest too many and understandest too few. Wouldst compare Pharaoh's power to mine? Come, then, to me, obstinate ambassador, and choose between Egypt and heaven."

And the thunder split in two, revealing a cleft to the core of infinity and nothing could be seen of Jahveh, for that his reflection was more blinding than a sanhedrim of suns. And Metatron, the Angel of the Face, descended to conduct the mortal to the regions from which a chorus of comets and fiery wheels was issuing. And, seeing that the Redeemer was only flesh and blood, Metatron changed his bones into torches of fire, his tongue to a fork of flame, his veins into rivers of air, and swept him into heaven with a retinue of seraphs brushing the way before him.

The first heaven, the Redeemer saw, was composed wholly of windows. From each of these, angels went back and forth on eternal errands, gathering prayers, delivering pestilence, conferring vigor, distributing sterility, moving mountains, uncurling buds, inciting war, dealing death, opening the matrix, planting the seed, appearing to men in visions, rescuing the falling sparrow.

The second heaven was vaster. Here the Redeemer saw

the angels mixing the elements for clouds, composing snow, manufacturing the thunders, storing the rain in endless arsenals, polishing the points of frost, refining dew, threading moonbeams, powdering the dust, separating degrees of light, chiseling hail, brewing and varying the weather in small but astonishing details. A spring of fourfold waters bubbled in the center and, flowing toward Paradise, divided into four streams to sustain the blessed. One river was of honey, one of milk, one of purple wine, and one of life-renewing balsam.

The third heaven, the Redeemer was made to understand (for his mortal eyes could form no conception of it) was the Heaven of Limitations. Here space was measured, time divided, boundaries apportioned, edges decreed, planets weighed, pulses regulated, limits set, orbits designed and executed. Here hosts of seraphim were determining the height of mountains, balancing the hills in scales, meting out the lesser heavens with a span, stretching the air, spreading out the sky like a curtain. In one corner, the Redeemer saw Nasdraël, the angel of Distance, pushing back chaos to make room for ten uncreated firmaments; in another corner he watched a seraph splitting a second. The seraph was so insignificant that he would have been lost inside a mustard seed, while Nasdraël was so tall that it would take a bird five hundred years to soar to his height.

The fourth heaven was the Heaven of Numbers. Here were many-handed angels busy with the glory of abstract mathematics. They labored with their ten arms going like flails, counting the grass blades since Creation, raking the celestial dust-heap for forgotten meteors, adding the raindrops of one season to another, subtracting grains of sand

from waves of the sea, figuring the amount of motes in a sunray between Mars and Mercury, squaring the vicious circle, helping parallels to meet, totaling the infinitesimals, the iotas and the given points, checking the increase of shooting stars, multiplying the eggs in the carp's roe, listing the vibrations of a glow-worm. Here the Redeemer saw the Guardian Spirit of Figures clothed entirely in concepts; he had seven and seventy thousand heads, each head having as many mouths, each mouth as many tongues, and each tongue cried, "Praise in happy numbers the work of Jahveh, Lord of Hosts, Emperor of Life."

The fifth heaven was the most puzzling. It was the Heaven of New Worlds. Here every experiment that ever was or will be, assumed a form that shifted instantly into another. Everything was something else; contraries met, merged and separated in this realm of flux and diffusion. Here were untried creations designed for unborn worlds: three-legged fish with luminous horns, fogs that shed arcs of thirty-three colors and thrice as many perfumes, rocks that gave birth to dancing stars, a womb that engendered creatures of ice, plants that spoke in tongues, women who kept silent, snails with the speed of humming-birds and the ferocity of lions, wisdom that could be retained. Here, too, the Redeemer observed the contradictory aspect of the angels that labored in such curious material. Above the waist they were fashioned of snow; their loins and legs were of fire. Yet the snow did not melt nor was the fire extinguished, for Jahveh had established complete harmony between these elements.

The sixth heaven was the Heaven of Building. Here, the Redeemer comprehended, was all that ever had been planned or would ever be designed. Here was all thought

and substance. And the Redeemer saw that both were one, that the Idea was the Thing, and the form it assumed was merely its projection into space. Here were the thoughts of every poet and here were all the tangible shapes they had ever found: books, battle-cries, monuments, kingdoms. Here were the literatures yet to be written and here were the books that would never be done. All objects were here with their ideas ranged beside them: boats and bridges and obelisks and idols and instruments and towns and clothes and ornaments and nameless devices—all as free of blemish, as pure as their conception in mind. Perfect, too, was the structure which surrounded this heaven without enclosing it: a topless temple, its pillars made of a wavering green smoke, its staves of purple fire, its thresholds of white air, its gates of hewn sapphire.

The seventh heaven was the Heaven of Heavens, the Heaven of the Highest. The radiance was so overpowering that even the angels approached it backwards. It was guarded by the countless sons of Zagzagel who, from the crowns of their heads to the soles of their feet, are studded with ever-open eyes so that nothing transpiring in any universe is unseen by them. This Heaven was empty of all but a great blinding sound, from the midst of which came a humming too low and a pulsing too high for human ears. Waves of light beat past them.

"They are," Metatron explained, "the Rhythms of Eternity. That vibration, not unlike a cithern, controls the moon, women and the tides. That ripple of harp-notes is the tempest gathering itself to descend upon earth. This wailing flute will, centuries hence, be translated into the lamentations of Israel's children. That plucked string is

a comet setting forth. This small ticking is only day and night passing through the heart of time. That note, like a cricket's lowest whisper, will be heard five million years from now as the Trumpet of Doom. And at the heart of all—"

Metatron ceased. From the very center of irradiant sound, a syllable of light spoke with the voice of flying bells. It was the tone in which Jahveh converses with his angels.

"And have you chosen?" it pealed. "Have you considered the ways of Creation?"

"O Lord of Hosts and Emperor of Life, thy works are numberless, and thy glory quickens the least of them," replied the Redeemer.

"Then know that all thou hast seen is but the shadow of my shadow, the reflection of a dream in a ripple of eternity. It is in the core of unlaboring activity I would place thee, in the paradox which is the peace of God."

And the Redeemer answered, "Manifold is thy goodness, and thy word is power. But my blood is not timeless; eternity is not my element; everlastingness is not in these bones. Let me learn to mold clay before I erect memorials of air. Give me perfection for a far-off goal, not for daily bread. Sanction me to fulfill the task for which I was appointed and suffer me not to fall before the onslaughts of my enemies. Strengthen me with the purity of thy ultimate heaven, but give me first the doubtful earth."

"And do you ask nothing except difficulty? Will you have nothing more now?" intoned a single chime.

"Nothing but my own flesh again."

There was a silence, then a vast chaos of ringing, then

a black flame carrying down the stars, then silence again. Thus it was that the Redeemer rejected heaven and chose his mission upon earth.

And when he came to his people—

A shadow rose between the reader and the light. Moses knew it was Aaron before he looked up.

"I hope your slumber was not disturbed by the late arrivals. Bad news I fear." Aaron's tight brow relaxed. "I see that Nath's manuscript did not keep you awake."

"I heard nothing, not even the jackals," Moses assured him. "And Nath has not mistaken his calling."

"Probably not. I've already confessed my prejudice. Yes, I've glanced through his poem. It's too luxuriant for my taste, too high-flying, and—unconsciously, I grant—too arrogant. But that's a trait common to all of us. The thing I like best in Nath's writing is the more conscious humor, a note which we Hebrews are supposed to lack. Now, as a recorder rather than a rhapsodist, Nath would be entertaining. His natural gift of—"

"Aaron, why are you talking against time? What is your bad news?"

"Frankly, your— Moses, I'm not quite certain. The secret messengers came only four hours ago and I hadn't the heart to rouse them so early. Besides, I wanted you to learn it at the first sitting without bias or interpretation. There; I hear our women-folk. The others will be down in a moment. Shall we break our fast within, or shall we share our table with your four-footed friend?"

"Let it be here."

Aaron untethered the animal and, with an abrupt gesture, drove her off.

"Here they come with your wife and my sister, Miriam."

Aaron's sister without a doubt. Except for the loose breasts she might have been Aaron's brother. Gaunt, square-headed, sickle-faced; an eye fixed in appraisal, a mouth tuned to disapproval. A prophetess of action, thought Moses, a prophetess with no love and little joy.

Zipporah followed with Gershom pushing ahead of her, and the two messengers from the southern quarries saluting. All sat down. Aaron picked up a piece of bread, about to break it, but it was Moses who said the Hebrew prayer.

SEEDS OF REVOLT

1

"You speak first, Mahali," said Aaron after the meal was over and the women had left. "We expect no pretty tidings, so do not sweeten your account."

"No fear. I'm no orator. I've been told to deliver nothing but the facts—and they're enough. Well, two weeks ago we heard a rumor that payments in the western quarries had ceased. We sent one of our men—Nepheg, called 'the mole' because of his underground work. Before he got back, an overseer from Thebes paid us a visit. We were told that the royal treasury was at its lowest ebb, that the government was having difficulty collecting tribute, that the new loan was failing and that workers would have to help in the national economy. There was much more, but the upshot was that, for the time being, the government would stop payment for work done in all branches. An emergency measure; temporary, of course, is what they said. But the wording was 'Until further notice.'"

"But this means slavery of the worst sort," broke in Moses.

"It's been virtually that for a generation or two," said Aaron. "The wages were nothing."

"Yes, I know. I should have remembered. But what news," said Moses, turning to the messenger, "was brought by your underground worker?"

"He's underground, all right," answered Mahali grimly. "We found his body in the granite-pit with the tongue torn out. And that's not the worst. The message that Nepheg couldn't deliver came in the form of six of our people from the western quarries. They had thrown down their tools, not because payment was refused but because they weren't even to be given rations. Food, they were informed, would have to be earned—after hours. Then they struck. They reached us nobly mutilated. Because they wouldn't raise their hands to labor, their hands had been chopped off."

"This is impossible!" cried Moses. "Has Akhnaton and all goodness been for nothing? This is—"

"This is Egypt," broke in Aaron. "Possibly Korah, Nepheg's brother, has other details." Aaron turned to the stoop-shouldered man who had not yet spoken. "What are the builders and plasterers doing?"

"Little as yet," answered Korah, "but what they're saying promises anything but a peaceful outcome. The men need little to tear loose. Several ugly stories are not improving matters. It's rumored, for instance, that all plasterers at work on the new tombs will be chained in the future. The chain will be loosened but not removed at the end of the day's work. Another tale that's spreading comes from the cataract where they're repairing the twin sun-towers. The story goes that a family of mixers—a father, two sons and a nephew—waylaid an Egyptian

foreman who had violated a twelve-year-old daughter. The family admitted beating the overseer but denied anything more than rough treatment; death, they claimed, was the result of a brawl between the foremen themselves. The magistrate refused to let them produce witnesses and sentenced them to die in any way that the foremen saw fit. The family of five, so runs the account, were covered with lime and immured between the outer and inner walls."

"Intolerable," gasped Moses.

"It's the sort of thing one hears," continued Mahali. "Korah has only passed on one of a dozen variations. Of course most of them are untrue, but it gives you an idea of what's in their minds—our minds—and what's likely to come."

Aaron had remained the calmest. He spoke now with apparently impersonal detachment.

"Mahali and Korah have provided a fair sample of the happenings of the last few weeks. Some of the outrages have been verified; others are not authentic—yet. The days are thick with messages. We have been busy saying much. But what else," he ended with a shrewd accent of resignation, "are we to do?"

"Do?" echoed Moses. "Anything but sit here shrugging shoulders!"

"You mean revolt?" cried Aaron. "That's what I hoped you'd say."

"Yes, revolt. But a peaceful revolution. An overturn without bloodshed, if possible."

Aaron's brow was a tangle of cross-purposes.

"'Peaceful revolution'? 'Without bloodshed'? How can that be accomplished?"

Moses ignored the irritated thrust.

"First of all by organization. Then a show of solidarity. Then a call on Pharaoh—"

"Pharaoh? You would do that?"

"—or rather on Pharaoh's masters. We will deliver our terms to Bialim's army of priests, wise men, and enchanters. We must have a magic more potent than theirs. That is why I say organize first of all. Mahali, how many are there in the western quarries?"

"A little less than three thousand."

"And how many could you count on?"

"About half. Not quite half, perhaps. The younger workers would rise at a word, but the older fellows are slow to take steps. They are always wanting to talk things over, and by the time they've finished discussing the pros and cons—"

"Exactly," nodded Moses. "And the same thing is true of the pyramid builders at the cataract, isn't it, Korah?"

"Just about," Korah conceded, "except it's a little more uncertain down there. Many of the men threaten direct action even if there is no outside assistance, but the majority feel so isolated—"

"And on the claybanks, in the brickyards, in the carpenters' sheds, everywhere, the report will be the same. They must cease to regard themselves as disjointed members; they must no longer think even as individuals. Aaron," Moses rose and stood away from the table, "I know what I came here for, and you know it now."

"I think I do," said Aaron, rising. "If it's what I believe, I'd be willing to give my life—"

"May that sacrifice be far distant. You may be less willing to give up your priesthood. But let events, not us, decide. First of all, we must have unity, unity of aim as

well as movement. And the workers must know they are one, not merely imagine it or hope for it. You, Aaron, must tell them. And you, Mahali. And you, Korah. And fifty others. There must be complete coöperation, never-relaxing vigilance. Above all, patience."

"And after fanning such flame, you speak of patience?"

"Yes," said Moses. "You can light a blaze in a moment with chips of soft wood. If you want the fire to last you must have a reserve of hard timber. Patience is a dull exercise, Aaron, but everything begins with it. Even this. We must be sure of our strength before we talk of striking. It will take weeks of unifying, months of gathering in secret rooms, training in deserted quarters, months of discipline. Today we can only protest; a year from now we will demand."

"And can we take this word to our comrades?" said Mahali. "Can we say it with certainty?"

Aaron answered for him in the oracular manner expected of a priest. "By the staff of Moses and the rod of Aaron, by the splendor that once was Egypt, by the strength that now is Israel, by the power that will establish the chosen people in their rightful inheritance, tell our brethren that liberation is at hand. Tell them," he continued in a more business-like key, "to assemble in places to be designated the first and fourth evening of every week. Representatives will be sent to address and instruct them. Reports will be expected weekly. All communications will be, as before, verbal; nothing to be committed to papyrus. Canvass the outlying districts. On the next night of the new moon, spokesmen from each unit and group-leaders are to assemble here. Other orders will follow. Is everything clear?"

"Everything. All that is needful now is the blessing of our God."

"And that," said Aaron, resuming the chiseled reserve, "you shall take back." He raised both hands, placing the thumbs and tips of the index fingers against each other. "Jahveh directs—"

"Not Jahveh," interrupted Moses.

"Not Jahveh?" frowned Aaron.

"No. Not a god for one tribe or one emergency. Not a war-god, even though in the end it may be war. It must be a new, a greater deity. A god for all tribes, all peoples."

"And his name?" cried Mahali and Korah, with superstitious anxiety.

"I Am," answered Moses.

"What?" echoed the two incredulously.

"I have told you," said Moses. "Call him what you will, but call him! And God—that God—will answer."

"So be it," concluded Aaron with despatch but without enthusiasm. "Meanwhile," he added sharply to the messengers, "don't depend too much on divine strength. There's work—and much ahead—for men to do."

2

The winter sky emptied itself of light, dropping a few stars as faint compensation. Night came suddenly now. Neither man had realized it until Miriam brought in the lamp. She remained in the room, matching herself against its frustation. Moses helped her, rejecting the silence.

"Say it, Aaron. We've exhausted subterfuge. And it's no use pretending. I know you've heard from Zohar and I can imagine what your silence means."

"What's the use of more talk, Moses? That's all we've been doing for a year. Of course, this report doesn't please me. But neither has any other in months. I tell you, we're wasting time. We've wasted twelve months already."

Moses' dispassion, Miriam noticed, was more weighty than Aaron's resentment.

"I can't agree, Aaron. Much has been done; much, I grant, remains to be done. I'll grant also that our original estimate of a year was wrong. But why should we bind ourselves to a haphazard figure and despair when events do not coincide? Don't let's hang everything on a date. I told you we'd have to be patient."

"I'm sick of the word, and that's the truth of it, Moses. Patience! And 'organization'! That's another word I've grown to hate. We want unity, don't we, and for all our talk, that's just what we're not getting. We make speeches and every one is greatly moved—especially ourselves. And then, what happens? Weeks go by, and the men, waiting for something to stir, find they can't live by words alone. The cooling-off begins. Difficulties grow. Delays multiply. There were over nine hundred workers in Zohar's local branch six months ago. Today he has four hundred and ten. Hezron's report is equally discouraging. He has been able to hold most of his group together—about six hundred and fifty—but his men grumble and demand to know our plans."

"That's a bad sign," conceded Moses. "When men ask for ways and means, they are beginning to lose faith in the ultimate. But they've been given details."

"No. They want to know what's going to happen *after* the strike for freedom. Where will they go? What work will they do? How will they live? And so on and so on. It's

this delay that's making them cautious. We've given them too much time to think. And once they start thinking—" Aaron raised hopeless hands.

"They will have enough to think of and to do," replied Moses. "It will be easy to keep them united once they learn unity of purpose. But first—"

"Action, Moses. Action's the one thing that will do it. Any action. A rally in the bricksheds would set off the others. An attack on the guards. Of course our men would be overwhelmed. We'd have to regard that as a sacrifice. But think what those fifty or a hundred deaths would mean. Martyrs—that's what we need, Moses. It would be a double incentive to every worker—a cause and a challenge. Then there'd be no holding them. Details, plans, ways and means, would vanish from their minds. You see that, don't you?"

"I see it, Aaron."

"Let me have my way, then. I've given in to you all along. I've followed your lead with misgivings but no questions. Try my way now. What makes you hesitate?"

"A hundred things. Memories, dreams, promises to myself. But one thing in particular. My aim was—still is—to get the workers out of Egypt without loss of life. We will need all our forces. It is not of tomorrow I am thinking, Aaron, or next twelvemonth, but five years from now, ten years, a generation."

"A generation! And meanwhile—?"

"Meanwhile, we have not failed. We have made mistakes— One of them we must not repeat. We have thought too much about men, Aaron, and not enough about—"

"God," interrupted Aaron impatiently. "I know. Here, too, we differ. Of course, men must have a God and, in my

profession, I would be the last to deny it. Give them a God —Jahveh, or your nameless one, or any other. The God doesn't matter; their ability or inclination to accept him does. This, in my opinion, is not the time to disturb their minds—or ours—with religious differences."

"There," said Moses cheerfully, "we are in complete accord. But what I started to say was that we have thought too much about men and not enough about their women."

"Women? You're not serious. You might as well talk to your ox or your ass. Women? Those short-sighted, big-eared, long-tongued—"

Miriam's mirthless laugh abbreviated his period.

"Spoken like a true brother, a priest and a foolish man. Moses is right. He realizes, though somewhat late, what you, Aaron, have forgotten ever since poor Elisheba died. Nadab, your oldest boy who's just married, knows it already. Those big ears and long tongues have, in back of them, minds of their own and also—this is Moses' discovery—the minds of their men-folk. Who do you think put dissatisfaction into the heads of Zohar's workers and dashed the enthusiasm of Hezron's group with caution? Ask their wives if you want the answer. Ask Zipporah why Moses argues for time."

"If Aaron will not be my ally, I can spare his sister," said Moses with a rush of anger. "I am not in the mood for word-twisting. As for Zipporah—"

Miriam's features made every effort to soften. "Twisting meanings is sometimes worse, Moses. Don't reject the intention. I only meant that you are not inconsiderate of Zipporah and the new baby. You would be inhuman if you

didn't proceed more carefully than Aaron who has nobody and nothing to lose."

"I am rebuked," said Moses. "You see," he added, turning to Aaron, "your sister is sufficient proof that women—"

"Oh," grumbled Aaron, "Miriam's different. She always was. And even if we should decide to ask the women to cooperate, how could we go about an entirely new campaign?"

"Thanks, brother, for the back-handed compliment. As for the method of approach, if you two would consider adding to your partnership? . . . Good. I knew *you* would, Moses . . . Aaron? Oh, don't be so grudging about it. Very well, I'll overlook your ungraciousness and offer a concrete plan as my first contribution to the triumvirate. The tribe of Naphtali is the most sensitive to insult, and its women the greatest gossips. Next month comes Bringing-in-the-God when, for five days, Thebes displays all its victims to the public. Among the condemned rebels are three from the tribe of Naphtali. Now when the women see the mutilated bodies and realize . . ."

Another twelvemonth passed.

MASS MEETING

1

In a corner of the brickfields a young Hebrew, scarcely more than a boy, with a brow like a sword-blade, was tallying and stacking the bricks handed him by an aged worker.

". . . and six are thirty-six and six are forty-two and six are forty-eight—fifty-four—sixty . . . And you will wait for the sons of Izhar and proceed to the place as before. But this time you are to go further. Make ready for night journeying, for it will be seven days before you can return."

"And who will take my place? And what will happen when the overseer notices my absence?"

"That, too, has been arranged for. My father is your build and age. Your fame as scholar, Uzziel, has not reached the overseers. To them you are only a white-bearded workman easily tired, and one old man is much like another."

"And who may you be with the chin of a babe and the subtlety of an adder?"

"I am a messenger of the chiefs, Moses and Aaron. My name is Joshua, son of Nun. But quiet. Hand me those bricks."

A shadow menaced; a voice gave it authority.

"Talking again—eh? You've been warned once. If I catch you at it again, you know what to expect. Any excuse?"

"The old man was faint. I was trying to restore him—"

"Never mind that. If he faints again, let him be. I'll restore him quick enough. Understand?"

"I do."

"Well, what're you waiting for? Go on."

". . . and six are sixty-six and six are seventy-two and six are . . ." The shadow swooped over the next group. "And then you will go on to the City of the Horizon."

"The—Horizon? The deserted city?"

"Yes. That's the reason. Keep on with the bricks. Seventy-eight. It is avoided like a den of devils, or ghosts. The Egyptians won't go near it. Which makes it safer for us. And eighty-four. Three nights from now—remember."

"I shall be ready."

". . . and six are ninety and six are ninety-six and six . . ."

2

The hills relaxed their vigilance, settling themselves for the night. Lion-yellow cliffs could scarcely be distinguished from the muddy river. Only a blue-black sky kept its intensity as Korah and Mahali, the last of the Israelites, arrived.

The ruined quadrangle where they assembled had once enclosed store-houses, granaries, cattle-barns, wine-presses. Now only a spurt of lamplight showed grotesque

outlines; a wall that joined nothing but air; two black columns thrusting insistently at emptiness.

"You're late," a shadow told them as they made their way to the place reserved for the tribe of Levi. The meeting was in full tide. Lamps were covered, faces shadowy. A raucous voice, its accent faintly Nubian, was complaining.

". . . and irrigation ditches. Never an end to them. Diverting the course of the river. Getting the water to run against its will and then raising mounds to stop its anger. Our feet in filth and water all day long, the sun stabbing at us overhead. And for what? For the vanity of priests, for the greed of our oppressors. Pleasure gardens watered with blood, fertilized with our flesh!" Outrage prodded to eloquence.

The face, exaggerated by a lantern, swung in the night and then plunged down into the muttering dark. Immediately a torch sprang up on the other side, defining a strained brow and the mouth of an ascetic. So compressed were the lips that it was the torch that seemed to speak.

"Zichri. Son of Kohath. Builder in the Tanis district. Straw to make bricks giving out. Told to mix the bitumen with chaff. We reply that we use chaff in our bread, not having enough flour. Then told to eat less bread. Are we to starve without a blow? My organization—nine hundred and fifty—want an answer."

He sat down, extinguishing his torch. A bright globe shot up in another corner of the quadrangle, an old man's treble with it.

"My name is Chabib, son of Kish. I am of the tribe of Naphtali. The zone of Memphis reports. Our men are being drafted for kneading stiff clay and mixing mortar

in the hot pits. But that is not the worst. Our women are taken for service in the fields. Twelve hours a day, wives and daughters, even the smallest children, are made to draw up water from the river, to work the heavy well-sweeps and carry buckets in the furnace-heat. It has been the worst summer in two generations. No rest is allowed. No excuse is permitted, not even for nursing mothers. We live between blows and the fear of blows. Why is this?" He stopped uncertainly.

Another spurt of flame and a swift, flame-like voice.

"Eliasaph, son of Deuel. Tribe of Gad. Worker near Thebes. Our unit has just completed the third outer wall. Orders are being given for a tomb for Tutankhamen. We have suffered enough through this boy-Pharaoh. The last of those cursed pyramids cost us four hundred men. I am instructed not to return until I can promise action."

"Action!" cried another voice.

"Action!" sang out two torches at once.

"Action!" "Demand—!" "Strike!" "Down with the walls!" "Action!"

The night became a wind sweeping lights and voices against each other. A steadier flame burned in the center of it, revealing a raised platform, once the foundation of a summer house. Moses and Aaron stood shoulder to shoulder. Moses raised his hand for silence, but Aaron spoke first.

"The hour has come," he said, "and we are ready for it. We know what to demand; you know what to expect. Promise us your strength and we will promise you a new world. We promise—"

"Nothing," interrupted Moses. A shout, followed by a grumbling silence. "Nothing now. You must not fatten

yourself with dreams. Action—yes. And, as God is our Lord, victory."

"Victory!" The blowing torches echoed the word.

"But not in a flash. There will be trials first. You will be driven out of towns, the desert will put dust in your mouth. The day will find you tired and laborless and the cold night without a hearth-fire. But you will be free."

"Free! Free!" shouted the chorus of lights.

Moses cut through the babel.

"Freedom is a word for one mind, and we are ready to deliver it to Pharaoh and his priests. Will you abide by the outcome? Will you rise together when the word is sent and wait together until you receive it? Will you—?"

The answer leaped out of the flood of murmurs like the ninth wave rearing above an incoming sea.

"Good. But no mob ever speaks for the man. It is men who must answer. Will you bear whatever is demanded until freedom? Wait! Let each spokesman answer in the name of his tribe."

The loose darkness gathered itself and resolved into twelve centers of tension. Aaron and Moses alternated calling the roll. Each clan responded with its slogan.

"Reuben?"

"By the strength of the firstborn, we remain united. First with Jacob; first with his children."

"Simeon?"

"Our fierceness is known; Simeon's fortitude waits to be tested. Yes, to the end!"

"Levi?"

"Yes, by the arm of Levi and battle-ax of Jahveh!"

"Judah?"

"Jacob promised Judah that the scepter should not de-

part from us nor a lawgiver from between our feet. We do not need weapons. Our hand shall be in the neck of our enemies."

"Zebulun?"

"Until we dwell at the haven of the sea, Zebulun shall endure all that is required of him."

"Issachar?"

"We saw rest was good and bowed our shoulder to bear, and became a servant to tribute. But our backs cannot stoop forever. Issachar rises with the others to demand our due."

"Dan?"

"A serpent by the way, an adder by the path, Dan shall bite the heel that tramples his brothers."

"Gad?"

"A troop shall overcome us, it has been said, but we shall overcome at the last."

"Asher?"

"Though our meal is chaff, our bread shall be fat when Asher's enemies feed on the south wind."

"Naphtali?"

"Like a hind let loose we shall mock the stumbling of our pursuers."

"Joseph?"

"If it be the will of El Shaddai, the Almighty, the archers shall shoot at us, but Joseph's bow shall never break, for it is the strength of the Lord."

"Benjamin?"

"We shall ravin as a wolf; in the morning we shall devour the prey and at night we shall divide the spoil. Let the test be soon, and in battle the last of the tribes shall be first. Benjamin for Israel! In the name of the Lord!"

The night shook with responses. "The wrath of the Lord!" "By the shield of Elohim!" "The trumpet of Jahveh!"

Moses raised his staff in the sight of the people, but there was no quieting them.

"You were right," said Aaron. "They want nothing more now. They require neither signs nor promises; they have faith."

"They will need it," said Moses.

"And so will we," added Aaron, "if you think we'll ever get Pharaoh's priests to let us go without bloodshed."

"They will hand us gifts at our departure," said Moses, with a smile. "I mean it, Aaron," he went on, answering the look of mockery, "impossible though it seems now. You, too, must uphold that thought. All things are possible to those who love God and listen to his words."

"And you expect to see the Pharaoh's high priest face to face?"

"I do."

"And challenge his authority?"

"I will affirm my own."

"With what words?"

" 'Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel.' And he will listen. And obey. But you will have to be with me in the spirit, Aaron."

"I will try, Moses. At least you can be sure of the body."

The tribesmen descended on them, bearing the leaders off on a wind of cheers.

BOOK THREE

"And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord . . . ?"

A NEW PHARAOH

It was Nile-day, day of benevolence, day of the hearing of petitions. Moses and Aaron walked down the avenue of ram-headed sphinxes, past the lotus-gate with its swallow-tail banners of magenta and blue, entered the great colonnade. It was high noon; a royal day. Impossible to tell which was gold-leaf and which was sun on the walls of the temple whose bronze-studded cedar doors stood open to receive them. After the pastures of Goshen and the blackened streets of the Horizon, the contrast was intolerable. These hundred-columned courts; the enameled halls; the elaborately carved architraves, two hundred tons in weight; the multiplication of images gaudy with faïence and precious stones; the magnified Amen, lurking in niches, triumphant between cloud-scraping pylons, confronted them everywhere.

The stage had been set for intimidation. Unholy fumes rose between the feet of every statue. Four poles of the canopy were hung with symbolic figures and magic-working emblems. The small Pharaoh was almost invisible among the army of priests and ministers, immobile in their heavy wigs and stiffly plaited skirts. A doll, thought Moses,

seeing the painted Tutankhamen in his precisely draped tunic, the wide sleeves making the little forearm even punier. His gourd-shaped head was heavy with a cruel head-dress, a crown like a giant's candle-snuffer. The eyes of the boy-king were dull; as Moses entered, they turned eagerly to the street where several young fellows were throwing knives at a block of wood.

"Couldn't I—?" Tutankhamen began with the loneliness of fourteen years.

"The all-powerful Pharaoh forgets," interrupted the nearest of his advisers, "that he has graciously consented to an audience with the representatives of the least of his slaves."

Moses recognized Bialim at once. The father spoke in the son's false deference, lived violently again in the fish-like mouth and the abrupt hand.

"Have I?" said the all-powerful Pharaoh. "But couldn't we wait until after? We've been sitting here all morning, and I—"

"This is the moment, O ruler of the peoples in Egypt," suavely continued the chamberlain. "Your servants await the revelation of your imperishable words."

"Oh, very well," replied the ruler, while two attendants helped him to rise, spreading a tapestry for his feet. "Clumsy!" he called to one of them. "Can't you be more careful! Oh, all right." This to Bialim, while arranging the upward-curling toes of his sandals in a strict parallel.

He began an octave higher than his natural pitch: "The Pharaoh has observed with pain— No. The Pharaoh has observed with aggrieved eyes and heard with pain, the insub—the insubordination of— The Pharaoh, excelling in mercy, has permitted . . . The Pharaoh—"

"—has summoned you," continued Bialim, frowning, while Tutankhamen resumed his seat with a whistle of relief, "to render an account of your seditions, to consider the extent of your crimes against his government and to listen briefly but patiently to what you may have to say in excuse."

"We have nothing to excuse," replied Aaron.

"Nor anything to say in our behalf," continued Moses. "But we have something to add in the cause of another."

"In whose behalf then?" asked Bialim, the corners of the fish-mouth curving.

"In behalf of our God. Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel: Let my people go that they may worship me and hold a feast in the wilderness."

The curve of Bialim's mouth deepened and his voice did not trouble to smooth its contempt.

"Who is this Lord that we should obey him? What is his name? Where does he manifest his power? Recount his victories, point out his monuments, describe his pyramids. What countries acknowledge his rule, what provinces, what cities? When he declares war how many generals follow him, how many chariots does he lead forth? What is his lineage, what are his properties?"

While Moses groped for the word to carry conviction, Aaron seized the challenge.

"His names are many but he is One. His breath creates flame in the earth's navel, his voice breaks mountains to pieces. His whisper is the hurricane; the sun and moon are his handservants. Leviathan is his plaything. Thebes and Memphis are toys he has raised for a moment."

Moses continued in a calmer vein. "His name, priest of Amen, is the heart's cry that the lips cannot frame. His

monuments are these hills; his provinces are not bounded by any sea. He stretches the earth by a word; his strength sustains the Nile to leap the cataracts and the child to spring in the womb of its mother."

"Words!" cried Bialim. "And words I have heard before. The Pharaoh is lenient and long-suffering, but we will tolerate heresy no longer. Your God is an intruder. We do not need him. We have the Nile which has its source under the Spring of Life. We have the wisdom of the world and the protection of Amen. We have a thousand gods within our kingdom; if we choose, we can summon those of Moab and Sumer and Zidon and Kheta to join us. What room is there for a slave's god who has no country, not even a name of his own?"

The ministers clustered nearer. Native love of dialectic defeated their contemptuous pose. They strained to the issue, neglecting court etiquette and Tutankhamen, who slid down into his seat, sucking a pomegranate. Moses resumed the argument.

"We are a peaceful people, a race of shepherds—"

But Bialim would not allow the change in tone. He was determined to keep the offensive.

"I will tell you who you are. You are intruders, like your homeless god. Almost four hundred years ago, you entered our land, some ten score of the family of Jacob. Our country was split with dissensions, torn apart by a succession of pretenders. You seized the advantage. We were easy prey for invaders—and you allied yourselves with them. You fawned on the foreign Hyksos, those shepherd-rulers—Semites, nomads like yourselves—abominated by true Egyptians. Your Joseph supported the enemy, and Apepi, cursed be his unclean spirit, allotted

you the best of our land. You multiplied like vermin and when, after two hundred years, the Hyksos were driven out, you had spread until every brook and rice-field was full of your refuse. Still we suffered you. For two hundred years more you lived on our bounty, grudging even the little labor we exacted in return. Then arose the Criminal King whose offenses against Egypt are still being erased from the records. Subtler than any adversary from beyond our borders, he tried to destroy Egypt from within. Once again you went over to the enemy of the people. Oh, we know your activities. We know you as a tribe and," he looked directly at Moses, "as individuals. A priest of the temple of Amen," he said with slow satisfaction, "was present at the confession of the courtier Ay before his exile to Aethiopia. And today," he resumed the accusing pitch, "there is new talk of betrayal. What is it now? Uncover your disguises."

Moses put a hand on Aaron's arm. Bialim's last sentences had broken through his control. He could not trust himself with a phrase. Aaron spoke for him.

"We have asked for three days' journey into the desert that we may sacrifice and hold a feast unto our Lord."

Bialim was in no mood for soft answers.

"Your people complain of lack of bread, and now you talk of a feast! Come—the truth! Why do you encourage the laborers to their downfall? Why do you stop the people from their works? There are many of you and to spare, and yet you make them dissatisfied with their few burdens. How will Egypt be fed or your own people be clothed? Will you furnish supplies by a miracle?"

Tutankhamen, finished with his fruit and lacking other entertainment, caught at the last word.

"A miracle," he cried, "show us a miracle."

"The ever-tolerant one forgets—" interrupted Bialim.

"No, I don't," answered the ever-tolerant one with the sudden despotism of youth. "I want to see a miracle. And if it's a good one I'll grant their request." He sat back with a fair imitation of regal benevolence.

"The Pharaoh has commanded," said Bialim with little effort to conceal the sneer, "a show of the power of your wonder-working god. We await a manifestation."

Tutankhamen clapped eager hands.

"No," said Moses to Aaron. "I will not ask God to debase himself. I will not pray for a special sign or impress them with a performance."

"Let me, then," said Aaron. He uttered an invocation and put his hand in the linen about his breast, holding it there for five minutes. When he took it out, it was white as a leper's.

"Call that a miracle?" jeered Tutankhamen. "Ho! Jannes! Hi! Jambres!" Two of the priests stepped forward. "Do that—and never mind the prayer."

The two priests imitated Aaron, concealing their arms for less than a minute. When they displayed them, they were white to the elbow.

"An old trick," said Tutankhamen, "and we do it faster. Do you do it by stiffening the muscles to control the blood or do you use chalk-paste?"

"The Pharaoh is quick to recognize an imposture," said Bialim suavely, "and unless there is reason for prolonging—"

"One minute," went on Tutankhamen, interested at last. "Let's give them one more chance. Jannes, show them what you can do with a stick."

Jannes, the older of the sorcerers, took a small stick from his bosom and tossed it twice in the air, catching it each time in his mouth. The third time, he let it fall to the ground, where it changed to a thin snake that wriggled at his feet.

Moses, learned in all the wisdom of Egyptian magic, whispered to Aaron. "That, too, we were prepared for. If these children are moved by snake-charming, let them have a look at your rod."

Aaron smiled and drew out a smooth-streaked rod twice the size of Jannes'. "I am no juggler," he cried and cast the rod before Pharaoh. The staff bent double, described a circle that straightened suddenly, and shot across the floor before Jannes' serpent had time to coil. There was a flash, a convulsive movement, and Aaron's reptile slithered back to him, a thin tail protruding from its mouth.

"That was better," applauded Tutankhamen. Then, turning to Bialim, "Don't you think—?"

"The trickery was neither new nor extraordinary," declared the priest and prime minister. "Our conjurers can duplicate such sleight-of-hand. Besides, the council has already determined. This," he raised the emblem of Thoth above his head, "O sons of slaves, is the answer of the most gracious and powerful Pharaoh: These are hard times and cannot be made easier for any, least of all for friends of rebellion. The Israelites are an idle lot; they talk of long sacrifices and three-day journeys because their burdens are light. Therefore the taskmasters and officers shall increase their labors. Those who are builders shall arise one hour earlier and remain at the structures one hour later. Those who are in the brickfields will make their

bricks without a supply of straw, but as many bricks as before will be expected of them. If the quantity be diminished by as little as half a brick, punishment will be exacted. Thus," he concluded with concealed mockery, "saith Pharaoh, the Lord of Egypt."

"The audience is over," cried the Nubians at the door as a dozen girls, led by a priestess jingling a sistrum, entered with swaying hips.

"The Pharaoh may now retire," said Bialim.

. . . AND AN OLD COMPLAINT

1

The wrangling had gone on for an hour; the ceremonies of the day and the excesses of the night provoked a sour morning mood. Bialim was more morose, less guarded than usual. A remonstrance from Jannes pointed it.

"I'm tired of being wet-nurse to the king, making his succession legal, marrying him to that silly Ankhsen, keeping him out of mischief— I'm tired of it. Yesterday it was all I could do to stop myself taking him by the ear and whipping manners into him."

Jambres, youngest of the enchanters, grinned, but Jannes shook his shaved head.

"What can we do?" he asked.

"Do?" said Bialim querulously. "Start house-cleaning. It's time for a change of dynasty. We need a man—haven't had one since the great Amenophis. Three Pharaohs—and look at them! A crazy mystic, a fool, and a stupid child."

"Were you thinking definitely—?" said Jambres suggestively.

"N-no. But I might easily. Horemheb is a fresh

possibility—a soldier, traveler, a mature and energetic human being. A rival to be respected—and watched. Today nothing seems more necessary than a change."

"You've begun well enough with the Israelites," soothed Jambres.

"Oh, them! Half-measures! There, too, I reproach myself. If I had proper courage, I'd drive them out overnight."

"Why don't you?"

"Because, as I've just said, I lack courage for anything final. I always see the expediency of inaction. There are plenty of reasons, if one considers, for doing nothing. Take the Israelites, for example. My instinct is to exterminate them to the last man. But who, then, will raise our grain and do our work? Where, since Nubia and Punt have refused to send tribute and since the army loots only for itself, are we to get slaves? Drive them out, then. But where would they go? Into the countries of our enemies, of course. They would plant themselves on our borders, possess the portions which any invader would enter first. If they joined the enemy—as they would be sure to—they could deliver into his hands every road and approach, places to fodder, information as to streams, knowledge of every granary and garrison. So here I hesitate, swinging in the balance between on-the-one-hand and yes-but-on-the-other."

"And you will do nothing?"

"Oh, but indeed I will," snapped Bialim. "I'll do it by attrition. I'll weaken them. I'll raise their hopes only to increase their hardships; encourage their arrogance and cripple them with denials. I wish I had Jacob himself

before me; I'd put a yoke across his back and a trowel on his shoulder."

Bialim's face was a cross-hatching of hate. The eyes, sullen with wine and fanaticism, narrowed. A heavy hand took Jannes' shoulder.

"Forget what I have said," he menaced. "It would be better not to mention it. There are five hundred thousand of these filthy outsiders, and we are less than seven millions from Napata to the sea. Besides, the time has not yet come. You understand? And you too, Jambres?"

"Perfectly," replied Jannes.

"We understand nothing except the last two sentences," said Jambres.

"Then let us resume the accounts," he said, pulling up a stool. "It is two months now since the funeral of Hurukh, and less than half of the expenses have been paid. That is your province, Jambres. And that reminds me to speak of the new *shabti* figures we have been placing in the tombs. Tell Greb-Nesor they will have to cost us less. Now, in quantity—"

2

The afternoon wound around earth like an iron hoop. Heat had shut the skies; one red cloud was an ugly hasp against the sunset. Both men waited for the first star and the messenger with concealed anxiety.

"It won't be long now," said Moses, looking across the flats to where road and river met.

"Long enough," growled Aaron, "long enough, anyway, for Bialim and his toy-Pharaoh."

Moses held up a placating hand. "I can't believe," he said, "that that child is a father."

"You can verify it without calling on his astrologers," said Aaron, conceding a grin. "Bialim married him off two years ago when he was twelve to Akhnaton's youngest daughter—the one with the limp—Ankhsen, they call her. Last month there was a baby, a boy."

The conversation died again. Both men strained to see beyond the horizon. The low hills cut against the saffron twilight, silhouettes without substance. The heat had left a little color, draining everything else. Insects made a noise like the creak of a withered branch. A topheavy palm whined as its dry leaves felt for a current of air. Even the lapping of water was not liquid; it had a hot, sandy sound.

"Isn't that a boat?" said Moses suddenly, pointing to a black smudge on the ash-yellow river. The blot took shape, extended a sail, threw out a passenger. They ran to meet him.

"Joshua, you're not hurt?" cried Moses, as they started back together.

"Not me," answered the messenger, "not even a scrape. The only place I had any trouble was Memphis. Bialim's spy system is working fairly well along the river. But you know how easy it is to bribe an Egyptian."

"And you found out? It's true?"

"True, right enough. Even in Bubastis and Kedj, cities with their own governor, our people have been refused straw. Neither straw nor a substitute is supplied to the workers anywhere. Wives and children are scattered up and down the land, gathering stubble, papyrus stalks, anything to give body to the mud. In upper Uabnet two families who had failed to deliver their quota were beaten so severely that the sons died and the father is maimed

for life. The floggings are on the increase; as we fall behind in the deliveries, the taskmasters will go to greater extremes. I hear they have full power to act without consulting Thebes."

"All of this I suspected," said Moses. "But, unless your expression is as much a disguise as your clothing, that is not the worst of your news."

"No, it isn't," said Joshua, as they reached the hut and Aaron brought out a platter of bananas with a bowl of milk. "Thanks. The worst news is from our own people. They're complaining more than ever."

"Of course they are," interjected Aaron. "They wouldn't be Hebrews if they didn't complain. I'm sure that Adam grumbled about the accommodations in Eden."

"What do they say?" inquired Moses.

Joshua made the bananas an excuse for evasion.

"Never mind, my boy. I can imagine. That things are worse since I came here. That instead of winning a point from our oppressors or even conciliating the Pharaoh, I've put a weapon into his hands. Isn't that it?"

"Something like it," agreed Joshua. "Oh, Chief, if you'd only give me a little authority. If you'd only let me do something instead of carrying messages. I'm not a boy, even though you keep on calling me one. I was eighteen last week. And I've learned how to shoot with the wide bow and use the short sword like the Egyptians."

Moses measured him with a swift eye. "Soon, my boy, soon. And your use of the sword may be valuable. We shall need captains."

"And a bodyguard," added Aaron with emphasis, "if we get no further help."

"We shall have that, too."

"Let it come," said Aaron. "And possibly you can tell me from where?"

"Do you think, Aaron, the Lord suspends his activities? The Nile is rising."

"Suppose it is. What has the Lord to do with that?"

"Aaron, is God only God when you see him through a miracle? Is Deity less wonder-working when it operates through natural laws?"

"Wait a minute, Moses, how do you know the Nile is rising? The first overflow never comes as early as this."

"I can answer your statement but not your question, Aaron. This year the Nile will rise a month before its accustomed time. And it will carry with it more than mud and bamboo-trees; it will carry a sign. The lakes are pouring their waters over the banks; the Subat is in flood. The Nile is already swollen at its sources. In two weeks we will stand before Pharaoh and prophesy further."

"But how can you be sure? And how will it help our people?"

Joshua supplied unexpected corroboration. "Five days ago when I was furthest up the river, I noticed dark streaks in the water. That must have been due to the red earth brought down from the Subat."

"And almost invisible plants the color of blood," added Moses. "We studied them when we first went to the Horizon. They rarely float this far downstream, but there is no mistaking them. And they will help us. As for our people, Aaron, their servitude is almost at an end. Not quite. For their own sake, for their strength's sake, they must learn to endure. Only by persistent faith can there be true deliverance. And that will come soon."

"In the meanwhile there'll be trouble enough. I was

serious when I spoke of a bodyguard. Think of yourself. At least think of Zipporah."

"I have been thinking of her, Aaron, and of the children. If I am to be singled out, I dare not risk them. That is one weapon I cannot let Bialim use. Zipporah must go back to Midian, and I must find some one to guard her until she reaches Jethro."

Joshua's mute appeal was not to be denied.

"Yes. You know the roads; you speak both languages. It's your first test of generalship, although it's a small army you're given to lead. And now let us complete the message to Pharaoh."

"I am ready," said Aaron, smoothing the papyrus he had been rolling and unrolling. He began to read: "To the Pharaoh upon the throne—"

"No," broke in Moses. "Let us have done with even so small a pretense. The poor boy will never hear those words. It is Bialim's eyes we must meet. We do not owe him the hypocrisy of flinching. Let it begin simply: *Thus saith the Lord, In this shalt thou know that I am the Lord. . . .*"

3

Joshua adjusted the last bundle, swung little Gershom up to the high saddle, and tightened the strap.

"Ready, Chief," he called with bright confidence.

The camel, blubbering, jerked to its feet and Eliezer, in Zipporah's arms, began to cry.

"There, there," she soothed, "it won't be long till you see your father again, will it, Moses? The child knows it's leaving you. Say something to comfort it."

Moses leaned to the baby.

"Eliezer, I named you," he said, "Eliezer, God is my help. Don't forget it. With a name like that to grow on, you will never have to cry elsewhere for help."

"He's not crying for help, Moses, he's crying for loneliness. Say something to comfort me, too. Tell me it won't be as long as Miriam says."

"Of course not," said Moses awkwardly.

"And you'll let me know as soon as it's safe for me to join you?"

"At the first minute," he assured her with a conviction too glib to deceive.

"And I'll come too, won't I, father?" piped Gershom. "And Grandpa Jethro will give me a pony for my own, won't he, father? And when we grow up, he'll be a horse and I'll be his captain, won't I, father?"

"A captain and a great, big, black-bearded one, that's what you'll be, Gershom."

"Oh, Moses," wailed Zipporah, "when will it be? No, I won't make a display of myself. Oh—"

"It's all right, mother," cried Gershom, patting her hands, "everything's all right, isn't it, father?"

Moses nodded, first to his son, then to Joshua. "Khi-khi-kh!" called the latter, clearing his throat. The camel-bell tinkled and the two impatient horses lifted their feet.

"It's good-by, then," said Zipporah, with final control; "you won't forget all the things I said to you last night?"

Moses found it suddenly hard to smile.

"I won't forget." Joshua brushed the horse's cheek with his palm. "Until we meet, Zipporah, God be with you."

"Until we meet and after, God be with you, Moses."

He watched them until he could not tell whether it was the heat that flickered or Gershom's waving scarf.

PLAGUES

1

Bialim sniffed contemptuously and read:

Thus saith the Lord, In this shalt thou know that I am the Lord: Behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink, and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink of the water of the river.

Behold, the very Nile which is a god to the Egyptians shall rise and curse them and be an abomination to them. And there shall come a red plague in their streams and pestilence upon their pools. There shall be blood both in vessels of wood and vessels of stone if thou wilt not do that which is required of thee.

"Of all the arrogance," exclaimed Bialim.

"Arrogance?" shouted Jannes, striking the offensive papyrus. "It's sacrilege, state sacrilege, that's what it is! Why do you tolerate it?"

"It amuses me," said Bialim, showing his stained teeth, "and today I find myself in need of amusement. An exaggerated screed, of course, but you must admit, it has a

manner; there's even a crude sort of style in its Hebraic swagger. I'd be tempted to say that fellow Moses is a defeated poet taking revenge on himself in a kind of doomed leadership."

"But why do you permit it?" insisted Jannes.

"I've answered you once, Jannes. Besides, the man puzzles me. His associate is a common type: a professional priest who happens to be a cynical Hebrew instead of a skeptical Egyptian." Jannes winced as was expected of him. "But this Moses is not so easy to solve. For one thing, I can't make out whether his silences are due to deep thought or just his being tongue-tied. His demeanor is a contradiction: his eyes spit anger one moment and burn with benedictions the next. His very ancestors must war within him. Which is the man—the militant rebel or the meek philosopher? No, I'm not going to give up one of my few diversions by having him put out of the way."

"But, he opposes you in public—and his strength is growing. The Hebrews in Western Thebes refer to him openly as 'The Liberator.'"

"So much the better. The combat has been too one-sided to be interesting up to now. Today I am in a mood for opposition. I'd welcome any one foolhardy enough to believe in justice or deity or any other illusion. There are few enough challengers. Horemheb's the lucky one. He can loose his energy on the world without hypocrisy; he doesn't have to direct a persecution from behind a sanctuary." Bialim kicked the praying-mat as one might kick an objectionable dog.

"But this message—? The rising waters?"

"Suppose the water does taste bad? When the overflow comes in late summer it always brings some red marl

and a little disease with the muck. I've been poisoned a dozen times myself. If there's more sickness than usual, let them boil the water before drinking it. Let them dig wells a little distance from the river. Let them clean out the stagnant reservoirs and the troughs at the corners. Let them— Oh, can't any one in this country think for himself?"

2

Suph, a weaver in Karnak, held a lamp with floating wick over the rags that made the child's bed.

"I don't like the way she's breathing," he said to his wife, putting his ear close to the mouth that was blowing invisible bubbles.

"It's the water. The river never rose like this before. It's over everything—even got into the wooden tanks. It's a kind of dirty red."

"Didn't I tell you four days ago to wipe out those tanks thoroughly?"

"Sure you did," replied the woman. "You told me to cook the water, too. Only you didn't tell me where to find time to do it in."

"Always arguing, aren't you," rejoined the man. "Haven't I enough trouble at the shop without getting more of it at home?"

"Go on, raise the roof," cried the woman. "*My* work means nothing. Nothing to you, anyway. Yelling about *your* job and *your* troubles and *your* time! I wish you'd stay home for a day, maybe then you'd see—"

"Horus and his sons! Have you forgotten the two families in the village?" shouted the man. "Shut up and look at the child."

"Why," said the woman, bending over, "she seems to be breathing quieter."

"Curse you and your filthy laziness," screamed the man. "Can't you see she's stopped breathing!"

3

And then came the frogs. Small green peepers, no larger than locusts, distended toads, the color of excrement, mottled frogs like bloated vegetation, frogs that were lumps of bronze, frogs with the eyes of unblinking demons, frogs subtler than salamanders, frogs motionless, frogs that leaped into the laps of screaming children, wart-breeding frogs, frogs like droppings of mud, frogs trailing their slime after them, flying frogs that built nests in high reeds, frogs that died and bred death. Once again the sacred Nile was the source of pollution. Its putrid waters brought forth the batrachians in horrible abundance. They swarmed through every house, sperming in bedchambers, defiling the beds, sleeping in the ovens, casting their dirt on bread in the kneading-troughs. The water stank, the food was loathsome.

The noise was a plague in itself. In his "Ten Triumphs of Jahveh, or The Plagues of Egypt," Nath records it as the least bearable of the attendant evils. After a rather hortatory prelude, his Second Chapter proceeds:

And toward midnight before the first frog had been seen, the Egyptians were awakened by the tinkling of a bell. At first so small that the listeners judged it the echo of a dream, the sound increased. A shrill ringing followed, then a low booming, then a jangle as of cracked bells disputing one another, then a high whistling as of

winds being hurled against reeds, then a harsh unison of all these sounds. Sleep was impossible for any one within the kingdom, from the porter outside the gate to the Pharaoh within his palace. And not for seven days did the crying and croaking diminish.

And miraculous was the manner of the visitation, for these were not ordinary frogs. Some said they were spirits of dead Israelites come back to vex the land that caused their misery; some said they were devils created by witchcraft in the rival countries below the last cataract. And others repeated stranger tales; they told that when a frog came close to a dwelling, the stones would move and make way for him. One claimed that he saw three frogs, scarcely larger than tadpoles, confronted by a marble wall, and the smallest cried, "Glorified is the name of the Lord Jahveh," and a rift appeared in the marble through which the frogs swarmed, ruining the temple of the idolaters. So eager, says another, were the frogs to perform the work of the Lord, that they cast themselves into the bake-ovens to devour the oppressor's bread, and not one was burned. But, though some of the tales may be story-tellers' embellishings, the facts are as here set down. And there was spared not one cubit in any of the land."

4

"It isn't a request I like to make of you, Horemheb," said Bialim, "but the fact that I have come here instead of summoning you is proof of the necessity."

"Thanks for the compliment," growled Horemheb with no attempt at grace. "Summoning is a habit you ought to get out of."

"And why, may I ask?" said Bialim, his fingers tightening under the table.

Horemheb scratched his hairy chest and squinted at the high-priest. The good-humored jaw altered its character.

"I'll tell you, my friend," he said with a trace of gutter-accent. "It isn't healthy in a country where things change so rapidly."

"Do you, as a hired army-man, think that a wise speech, Horemheb?"

"Come," replied the other, leaning back and spreading his shoulders, "I'll lay my hands on the table. Oh, don't bother, Bialim; I know your cards. Well, understand this. I have no ambitions. I do my job and I like it. I pray to the gods and, what's more, I believe in them. I know my duty as a temple-goer as well as a patriot. But," the eyes held Bialim's, "duty is something every man must interpret for himself. Especially," he repeated, "in a country where things change so rapidly. Remember that, Bialim."

The prime minister held out relaxed palms. "There, Horemheb, are my hands, too; and possibly they conceal less than you suspect. By all means, let us be open with one another. You resent me; I am none too fond of you. Our worlds have little in common except mutual distrust. Patriotism, religion, the code or passion which you regard as an end in itself, I use as a not too venerated means. You are a sentimental idealist, my bluff commander of the army, while I, a dealer in prayers, am a practical opportunist. Now we know each other. And need I mention a recent example to show you what sort of glory the idealist may expect?"

"You needn't. My job is not winning glory, but bat-

tles. And by battles I don't mean cutting up a few families of overworked, underfed Hebrews."

"H'm," murmured Bialim, "aren't those phrases rather seditious for a patriot? I believe you admire the offal."

"I admire their pluck—and I'll be cursed if I let my army have less of it than unarmed slaves."

"You mean you won't give your help to cleaning up the cities and preventing the spread of disease?"

"I mean just that, Bialim. My men are soldiers, not street-cleaners. Why didn't your precious Council of Welfare do something about the frogs before they died and stank up the whole country? There's something for your priests to do— Amen knows they need exercise. Or set them to catch the runaways. That's the sort of training they need; they're getting too fat to enter a race of stuffed geese."

"You may have cause to regret that speech some day, Horemheb."

"Maybe, Bialim. Meanwhile, take good care of your imitation Pharaoh. If he falls, most of his priests will not be found standing. Once upon a time there was a king by the name of Shakhara—"

"Thanks for the story. But the rest of it is familiar, especially since I helped write the last chapter. The tale of Tutankhamen will have a happier ending. I hope," he added with a dubious smile, "you'll be there to hear it."

"I hope so to both of your pious wishes. And come again soon. Nadj!" he struck a small gong. "His supreme holiness, the high-priest of Amen, is leaving."

5

"From Moses and Aaron to the officers, delegates and heads of all units between Thebes and the great sea. The following orders are to go into effect at once:

"All Israelites are to withdraw as far as possible from the Nile, its arms and tributaries. The unusual floods which brought the plague of frogs will bring worse. We must guard against pestilence. There must be more vigilance in the matter of sanitation. Greater care must be exercised in selection of food. No shell-fish of any kind; nothing is to be taken from the river except live fish. Anything found in the water that has not fins and scales is to be considered unclean and an abomination. All creeping things, mice, ferrets, lizards, weasels, and their kind, are also forbidden. They are not to be eaten, no matter how great the need. Swine, eaters of refuse, scavenger-beasts like the hyena, and carcases of animals that are not cloven-footed are unclean. Households to be cleansed weekly. All vessels and cooking utensils to be scoured at once. All sufferers from Nile-fever shall wash their clothes three times: first in brine, then in boiling water, then in a solution of cold water and hyssop. If boils appear on the flesh, clothing must be burned and the flesh bathed in brine until the skin is clear. Incense or a small fire of aromatic twigs is to be kept burning in every chamber to destroy the flies which will come over the land as the river subsides and the waters stagnate. Remember the laws concerning beasts, to make a difference between the unclean and the clean.

"These regulations are to be carried out to the letter and remain in force until countermanded."

. . . AND PESTILENCE

1

THEN came the flies. Armies of them overnight. The dust choked with their buzzing. In the dead air, they made numberless and horrible small winds. Out of the refuse and the frogs they rose. Gnats carrying poison in their unseen fangs, gall-flies that deposited their maggots everywhere, blowflies of a persistence unknown even in Egypt, dog-flies that set animals mad, vampire-flies that fastened themselves to flesh and attacked the moist edge of the eyelids, black flies covering the meat with a cloth of corruption. Vermin followed. Lice that grew where only death could thrive; ticks that drove the sheep stampeding from the fold; parasites that dug under the nails and could not be extracted. From inundated rice-fields, from the kitchens of the Pharaoh, even from the royal tombs, they issued in foul swarms. Only the Hebrews were prepared. Along the river, a few of them suffered; none in the province of Goshen.

Nath recorded the next phase as a natural consequence. He wrote:

And the horse-flies spread infection and the gnats

brought sickness from the swamps. The very dust was impregnated with disease. The story-tellers in the marketplace swore how Moses took hot ashes from the furnace and sprinkled them toward the heavens and they descended on the Egyptians, becoming a murrain on the cattle and grievous blains upon man. The bellowing of oxen did not cease with nightfall; ulcers came upon their hooves and, when they licked their feet, running blisters formed on their mouths. And all who ate their flesh sickened. The blight fell not only upon cattle in the field but upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, and upon the sheep. And the boils upon men were the worst of all. Washes and unguents were unavailing. But not one of the cattle of the Israelites died, and all of the children of Jacob who had followed the commands of the Liberator rejoiced with a loud voice.

2

The drill had gone badly. Two detachments of Horemheb's soldiers had been detailed to stable-duty.

"Black devils," spat the one-eyed Theban, cursing and scratching his scabs. "It's all their fault."

"Whose, One-Eye?" inquired a bowman with a split lip. He knew the answer well enough, but enjoyed the Theban's profanity.

"The Hebrews—who else, you lousy son of Set. They're in back of it all, I'm telling you. If you can't see it, you must be dumb as you look."

"How come?" prodded the bowman with a wink at the others. "And don't lose your temper, soldier-boy."

"You'd have temper, too, Scar-Mouth, if you had what

I have. *What* a government that stands for such things! How come? Well, every one knows that our gods are at war with their god, see? And then what happens? The Hebrews, or their god, put something into the Nile—*our* Nile—and we can't drink the water. See?"

"We dug trenches and pits and got some, didn't we?"

"Yeh, a cupful a day. And call it water? Say, I'd rather drink green oil. Well, let it pass." A pause while the scratching became frantic. "Then, what did the fatherless dogs do? Out of the same river we live off, their god-damned god brings frogs by the million. And we're forbidden to kill 'em. 'Cause why? 'Cause of Heka, the frog-headed goddess—Heka, the Multiplier. They multiplied all right!"

"What makes you think the Hebrews are the only ones responsible?" said a heavy-jawed sergeant, rumored to be an illegitimate son of Horemheb. "I got a feeling our own priests had a share in it. Didn't our magicians turn water into blood and bring up frogs? They want to get us sore at the Hebrews—all of us."

"Well, *I'm* sore," shouted the Theban, and was rewarded with a laugh. Now that he was the focus of attention, he no longer minded being the butt. "And be careful where you shovel that stuff. Tricks, that's what our magicians did. Just tricks. And they stopped doing 'em after the flies came. Their god did *that* too. And the lice! Ugh—! Ticks smaller than grains of sand that swelled up to the size of cocoanuts."

"Come off, One-Eye. Tell us a story, but make it a good one. And why did the magicians stop? You tell him, Thickhead." The grin was general.

"Maybe they weren't bigger than peppercorns, but look

what they did! They even got into the sacred beasts in the temples—a fellow told me that the White Cow of Momemphis died while they were sacrificing to it. And then the blisters!" He held up an arm spotted with pustules.

The one with the scar, not to be ignored, interposed again.

"I'll tell you why the magicians stopped, if you want to know, Stupid. They couldn't stand up or sit down to do their magic because of the boils on their backsides!" The appreciation of the joke was enormous. "You got to hand it to the Hebrews' god this time, One-Eye, and to their leaders. They know what they're about. I'd be all for 'em—if they'd only let up on us."

"Well, if they don't like this country," growled One-Eye, sullen at losing his audience, "why don't they go back where they came from?"

"Maybe they will. For my part, I wouldn't try to stop 'em— Eh, fellows?"

"I'd pay 'em to get out," assented the son of Horemheb, beginning to load the manure.

"Oh, I suppose I would, too, if they'd take their god with them," agreed Scar-Mouth sourly, wiping a wet hand on his thigh-bandage. "And how many times do you want me to tell you about your shoveling," he burst out. "If you bums do that again, I'll hammer you both!"

3

"Wait a moment, Jambres," said Bialim, as the services ended and the younger priest started to follow the others. "I don't like your mood. You made four mistakes in the

liturgy this evening, and you forgot to touch the mummy's mouth during the recital of the Book of the Dead. What's the matter?"

"I wish I knew," answered Jambres, dully. "I thought it might be Nile-fever—what with the slime over everything. But the Kher-heb says my blood's all right. It must be devil's work," he went on, more hesitantly, "for I've gone over all the spells in the incantations of Thoth, and not one has given me the least relief."

"I suppose you, too," sneered Bialim, "will be saying that the Hebrews have something to do with it."

"Yes," replied Jambres, avoiding Bialim's eye. "I am willing to admit when I am worsted. If this is the finger of their god, I am not anxious to feel the weight of his hand."

"By the feather of truth!" Bialim broke out. "Pull yourself together. You're not going to let a superstition get the better of you. What! You a priest—and an experienced one—believing in a god! Come, Jambres, soon you'll believe in your own magic."

Bialim's forced laugh was not even rewarded with a smile. Jambres remained deferential but unpersuaded.

"You may be right," he said; "I know we've had these troubles before. The flies are an ever-present plague and as for the lice—" He dismissed them with a weary gesture. "But we've never known them in such numbers; sickness has never been so intense. And our own reports show how little the Hebrews have been affected."

"Amen and his shadow!" swore Bialim. "You talk like an ignorant worshiper. You're almost as simple as Horemheb. I suppose you, too, would like me to summon their

'liberator,' this Moses, and wish him and his people godspeed."

"Yes, I would," answered Jambres, looking up with a desperate courage. "And I'm not the only one."

"Well," snapped Bialim, biting off the last of his smile, "I have no idea of doing it. You and your friends are cowardly. Worse, you're impractical. Where will you find laborers if you let this half-million go? Who are you going to get to cultivate the land? I suppose the priests will give up their easy beds and till the soil in Goshen? Possibly you'll find me another natural barrier between here and the border? Or perhaps the sympathizers with the strikers will complete the unfinished fortifications on the eastern frontier? Strikers—pah! You've made me fall into your way of thinking. They're rebels, that's all. The free workmen of Thebes may have the right to strike—not slaves belonging to the crown. I tell you it's insubordination, not independence. And the Hebrews and their friends will find out . . ." Bialim stopped. "Never mind, Jambres; you're too ill to think straight. Besides, you're making me lose my temper. Better go now, while there's some of it left. Between the Hebrews' god and Egyptian stupidity, my heart is being successfully hardened. Go now, Jambres. And you might try a double dose of fig syrup. A purge and a two days' fast will set you up again. Stop shaking your head. Look after your liver, and leave the Hebrews to me."

4

Moses flattened his roll for the fifth time and tried again. Useless. He pushed the ink-palette aside. His thoughts turned over and over like tumble-bugs in a circle. Some-

thing kept ideas and words from joining each other. Slowly Moses realized that the buzzing of angry flies was the drone of human voices. He listened more intently, curious to learn the cause of their insistence. His name sounded. And again. He approached the door. In the field beyond, two workmen of the agricultural unit had stopped tilling for the less arduous labor of argument.

"But you believe it, don't you, when he says that God made the covenant with Abraham? It's—why, it's a proverb!"

"An old one, too. And like most proverbs, it's often quoted but seldom believed. What has he—or his God—done? That's the question."

"Look how he's organized us all."

"Yes. And what's the result? I don't have to tell you. Before all these conferences, the Egyptians may have had a suspicion that we were working for freedom, but it was only a suspicion. Now they are sure of it, they know every move we make. Between Moses and Pharaoh, we suffer the fate of the sheep."

"What sheep?"

"The one in the story, of course, that's being dragged away by the wolf. The shepherd runs after the animal, catches up with him, and starts to claim what's his. The wolf refuses to argue, so the shepherd grabs at his sheep. He pulls one way; the wolf pulls another. And, between the two of them, the victim is torn to pieces."

"Yes, yes. There's something in what you say. And another thing. Why should Moses ask us to give up Amen or even Osiris until his own God does something to show we *are* his people? Afterwards, of course—"

Moses turned away. Three hours later Aaron and

Joshua found him in the dusk with his head in his hands.

"Sorry we're late," called Aaron. "Bring in the lamp, Joshua, and we'll go over the entries. Ah, here we are. What? Nothing since we left? . . . Why, Moses, what's the matter? I thought when we came in you were deep in thought, but now I'm afraid it's in trouble."

"Yes, I am troubled, Aaron. I've been hearing things."

"Of course, you have. So have we, haven't we, Joshua?"

"Yes. There's always some backsliding and complaining. You've got to expect it."

Moses shook his head with the heavy puzzlement of his early debates with 'Nophis.

"But this isn't hearsay," he said. "It comes with greater force when you learn it from their own mouths. I heard two people—two of our own workmen. And what they said here is being said all over Goshen."

"I doubt it," objected Aaron. "We happen to have rather different tidings—eh, Joshua? Besides, what do a few words mean? Surely, Moses, you know your own people well enough to realize they are never quite happy unless they are pitying themselves and finding fault about something—usually their superiors."

Moses, in spite of his headshake, looked at Aaron with gratitude.

"It's good of you to encourage—"

"My dear father," continued Aaron, noticing neither gesture nor words, "used to say that we Israelites must pay for the privilege of belonging to that perverse and stiff-necked and irritating but chosen people. You must be prepared to stand their abuse, Moses. They may pelt you with worse than epithets; they may cast stones. But spoiled children do just such things. It's better than spine-

lessness. Strength is in it, strength to endure what others would find unbearable. I remember, as a child, asking my father when he spoke of the chosen people, 'But what are we chosen *for?*' 'Chosen to suffer,' he answered with a hard smile. 'Do you expect to be a Hebrew for nothing?' "

"Grand!" cried Joshua as Moses nodded his appreciation.

Moses said, "No man ever had a more helpful partner. Tell me, Aaron, who was your father?"

Aaron darkened. "I didn't mean to talk about him. It's almost forty years ago."

"My age exactly," said Moses. "But what has the time to do with it?"

Aaron would not detail the past. "We hadn't been in Egypt long. There was a riot. The Levites got the brunt of it. Amram, my father, was the youngest priest of the family group. He was killed—murdered."

"Amram!" repeated Moses.

"Yes. It's a common name in our tribe. . . . Come, Joshua. Tell him the news."

The boy was big with it. He needed nothing but an audience; even so preoccupied a one as Moses could not deflate him.

"We've got plenty, Chief. First, we found out through our agents assisting the Pharaoh's scribes, that nobody in the palace knows what any one else is doing. Bialim has written to Neferneferu—Akhnaton's daughter, who married the King of Babylon—asking for soldiers to help her sister Ankhes. And Ankhes is asking help against Bialim. And who do you think she's in communication with? The Foreign Office of the Hittites! She even goes so far as to hint that 'in the event of the death of her husband, Tut-

ankhamen'—that's looking ahead for you!—she would be happy to arrange 'a marital alliance' with the Hittite Prince!"

"What a nest of intrigue!" said Moses.

"Wait!" said Joshua, still bubbling over. "There's a new party growing that will keep Bialim awake a night or two. A compromise group, engineered by Akhnaton's nobles. They're promising liberal reforms, and there's a story that your old friend Ay has come back to the capital in disguise."

"Ay?" said Moses. "You bewilder me. It sounds like melodrama."

"That's what it is." Joshua's eyes snapped. "Ay is their candidate. And Horemheb's another, according to every one in the barracks. And when it comes to—"

"Take a breath, Joshua," rallied Aaron. "And skip the next twenty minutes. Let Moses have the part you've been saving for the end."

"That's right, Chief," said Joshua, unabashed. "You know I've been chummy with some of the half-and-half fellows of my own age in the encampment. Well, two of them swore that Bialim could yell his head off, but the soldiers were finished with him. One of the fellows said he heard an officer say that Horemheb told him *if* the Hebrews escaped, Bialim could go after them himself. Not so bad for a day's work, is it, Chief?"

The mixture of appeal and assurance was irresistible. For the moment Moses forgot his preoccupation.

"If old Nun were not so jealous, I'd adopt you, Joshua. But in what capacity? You're too young to be my father, and too old to be my son."

"Why not as a younger brother, Moses?" interposed

Aaron. "We're all brothers, so you've said—at least in the spirit, aren't we?"

"At least, Aaron."

5

Winter, coming suddenly, was little more by day than a premature spring. The sun held the chill off easily. At night winter asserted itself, tightened the earth and sharpened heaven to a few separated stars. Frost was trying the air, but Moses did not heed it. He did not even notice that the last runnel of light had seeped under the hills and that his hands were ice. It was not cold that made him strike them together.

"O God," he called to the largest star, as if he thought to move that fixed eye. "Why have you hidden your face? Have you deserted us forever? Your people cry out in darkness; they have spent their tears; their spirits fail while they wait for God. Are we to be left without another sign? Six months ago the Nile rose to aid us and spread pestilence among our enemies. Six months ago; long months. Since then nothing—nothing except increasing hate from the oppressor and the failing hope of your own people. Dear God," he cried in a climax of self-torture, "why was I chosen for what I cannot do? Why did you send me? Only to mock my sense of power? Tell me; make it plain. I cannot comprehend your ways. Too much is hidden; you are shut off from me. Reason and old doubts confuse; they come between us. Help me. My faith cannot feed on itself forever. How can I look to the unseen when what I see is so full of failure? Bondage and anguish of spirit everywhere. Failure, failure."

He waited, as if hoping for a contradiction. There was none and he continued.

"Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people. Deliverance is far off as ever. What am I to say to them? How can I blame the unhappy creatures if they turn away from me now? Were they not sunk low enough before my meddling brought them to more hopeless depths? How can I reproach them if they lose heart and worship idols? The Mnevis bull stands to them for greater power than the God who promises to reveal himself but never does. How can I persuade Pharaoh's priests if the children of Israel will not listen?"

Again the pause and the unanswering night and the renewed self-accusation.

"God forgive me when I wrong my God. It is I who have failed. I alone. Impatience, fretfulness, the old fears destroy me. I have failed my people. I have failed myself. I have failed my God. I am worthless. Cut me off."

The cold increased. It seemed to reach out of the long cloud growing across the horizon. Though Moses was aware of it now, he did not move from the rock-seat.

"I am worthless," he repeated. "I am blinder than the blindest child I dare to lead. I try to limit the illimitable, to bind eternity in an hour—and complain when it escapes. Am I never to trust what I know? Must I always look for the riddle of God and not find its solution anywhere, everywhere? Will I fail to recognize his design in the smallest because the pattern is too big for me to see?"

The cloud darkened, extended itself and annexed the hills, pulling them along the north.

"No," said Moses, regaining quiet. "I am not a child

crying in the dark. I know my Father has not forgotten me; he waits to reveal himself wherever I look. A burning bush contained him once; that cold cloud is his arm flung out to sustain me now. He has heard, clearer than I, the groaning of his children; he will bring them out from under their burdens. With a strong hand he will guide me to the place reserved for them. We will come into our heritage. The covenant is established. I know it," continued Moses with increasing affirmation. "If all Egypt should deny me, if the Israelites themselves should repudiate me, I would go forward. I was made for this; I *will* lead. I will save the people in spite of themselves; they shall have their kingdom if I have to drive them for years against their will."

"O God," he cried in a burst of contrition and assurance, "I will never doubt again. I will know that nothing can separate me from the source of strength. There is no limit to that rich supply. I will recognize it in the seeming accidents of every day. I will draw confidence from the least; strengthened by all that rises from earth or falls from heaven."

It began to hail.

HAIL, LOCUSTS, AND A DIALOG

1

Nath tells us little concerning the seventh plague. He, himself, seems uncertain whether to treat it as a natural phenomenon or an abrupt miracle. His attempt to combine both interpretations is one of the quaintest episodes in his manuscript. In the beginning of his narrative he sets down an orderly fact or two, but soon we find him striking out with metaphor and exaggeration. In the end, he casts himself adrift on a tide of fantasy. His conclusion is typical:

And the wind came down like a live ax upon the trees and smote the vines and boughs laden with fruit. Thunder tossed about the sky; flame blew along the ground. Not one branch escaped, for the wind brought a hail that fell for seven days, a hail that flew with the speed of arrows and the sharpness of newly ground knives. And the flax and the barley were smitten before the Egyptians could gather the harvest, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in blossom. Only the wheat and rye were spared, for they were not grown up. He gave them hail for rain, and fire for ice, runs the proverb. And so it proved to be.

For a fire swam in the center of each hailstone as a burning wick floats in the oil. And the Egyptians suffered twice with every drop of hail: pierced with icy daggers and, as these melted, burned with the hot core.

Only when the priests promised to hearken to the voice of the Liberator did the plague cease. As Moses was arranging a truce with them, he raised his hand and the plague lifted. While they debated, the hail remained suspended in the air, like a curtain of diamonds. As the sun shone through it, the people were dazzled with a play of color such as the world has never witnessed. And the fringes of the hail, blowing against each other, struck a set of glassy notes, tinkling melodies compared to which the sweetest earthly music is a discordant travesty.

Joshua, who had extended his usefulness to Moses by learning to write, gives us no more information. His account of this period is written with soldierly precision and total lack of verbal ornament. Joshua's entry follows:

Little activity this month. Goshen quiet but restless. Strike in Tanis put down and twelve from Asher sacrificed to the jackal-god. Conference at Thebes. No result. On the twelfth day of Adar a long and severe hail-storm. Crops affected, but not ruined. The Egyptian farmers to the west were the chief sufferers.

2

Nath is more definite regarding the locusts. He fixes the exact hour of their advent "in the shape of a black, bellying cloud," and includes a comparative list of the damage done in the different provinces. He seems to have studied them closely; his descriptions bear the evidence of first-

hand observation, even though he is unable, in the end, to restrain his exuberant imagination. Thus, for instance, he speaks of their dilating air-sacs, and abnormally developed mandibles, but cannot help adding that "their teeth are sharper than the crocodiles', and the jaw-teeth of a locust are as a lion's." It is Nath whom we must thank for a generally accurate picture of these migratory insects, whose coming "obscured the sun and deafened the ears with the clashing of their myriad wings." One wonders how many hours he spent examining the locusts from the moment the hatched larvae began their destructive career. He is the first to tell us of the large head immersed behind in the thorax, of the organs of flight pressed to the sides of the body; he even describes their peculiar stigmata.

The other records of the time agree with Nath's estimate of the destruction caused by the insects. "All the trees, except a few sycamores, are ruined," says an unknown scribe in a report to his superior in the delta. Nath's conclusion is a reckless mixture in which it is difficult but not impossible to disentangle the facts from their embellishments:

Once more Moses dispatched a warning to the powers that mocked him. Egypt will soon be cut off from the earth, prophesied the liberator. Ye have not heeded plagues nor wonders. But the end is not yet. If ye will not humble yourselves and let my children depart, worse shall befall ye. So said Moses.

Meanwhile the locusts remained in the land, covering the earth with their evil green, eating the residue of that which escaped the hail. When the Egyptians saw that even the flax was consumed and they had nothing where-

with to make their linen, they complained to their priests, saying, "How long shall this man Moses be a snare to us? Let the Hebrews go, that they may serve their God before all Egypt is devastated."

Only when the servants of Pharaoh entreated Moses with promises did the plague lift. Moses went out and supplicated, and a strong west wind came and drove the last of the locusts into the Red Sea. Even those locusts which the Egyptians had stuffed and preserved in their pickling pots for dainties, rose out of the brine and flew away.

The next two sections of Nath's papyrus are undecipherable.

3

The avenue of stone rams had been extended, Moses noticed, as he walked down the highway connecting Karnak and Luxor. All along the roadside Bialim had carved Tutankhamen's insignia over those of earlier kings. Moses was particularly amused at the repetition of miniature models of the present Pharaoh between the forelegs of the rams where the effigies of the great Amenophis had stood. He smiled but did not pause until he entered the vast hall of the Temple and caught a glimpse of Thutmose's obelisk. "Not the Third Thutmose, but Thutmose the First—remember," he could hear Amenophis saying as thirty years fell away. His boyhood rushed back to him with the old landmarks. Here was the court in which he and 'Nophis had been forbidden—how many times—to play. "This," Mother Ti had said, "is the most beautiful colonnade in the world." And he remembered how the Pharaoh had held him up so that he might see the columns with their clusters of papyrus buds and note how the in-

dividual stems stood out so realistically. Their delicate line was gone now, spoiled by Bialim's unchaste additions. There was an indecency about the new paintings that crowded the walls—gaudy in color, blatant in design, with bands of musicians playing harps, pipes, and guitars, while others danced, clapping hands and rattling tambourines in praise of Amen. The past was savagely jarred; the new structures brought Moses inimically back to his age. He could not ignore it. The remodeled tower of the second pylon and its more recent twin affronted him. Here the triumph of Amen over Aton was commemorated.

Moses had never seen the monument, but something—could it have been the shape of the stones?—called to him familiarly. It was not until the corner was turned that he understood. The cartouche of Akhnaton, poorly chiseled out, was still decipherable. The side of the stone holding the hated reformer's name had been turned—a vengeful irony—away from the sun, and a new set of hieroglyphs faced the passers-by. Moses remembered the singing day those blocks had been hoisted into place, at dawn of the New Year when Sirius reappeared at sunrise on the eastern horizon. It was a silent commentary. Here was the last remnant of Aton's sanctuary meekly upholding the power of his enemy. The smile faded as Moses entered the pavilion; a long wrinkle deepened as he saw the reception room empty except for the chamberlain.

"I have sent for you," said Bialim, "that we might have one more talk. I have postponed the official audience so we could have that talk freely. You did not fear to come alone?"

"What is there to fear?" answered Moses. "My death

could have been accomplished easily a hundred times during the last twelvemonth. I am preserved by the Lord."

"Possibly I have a part in that preservation, O divinely appointed one," said Bialim, with mock deference. "The Pharaoh's advisers have suffered you to live this long. Can you tell me why their patience should be tried any longer?"

"High Priest of Amen, and prime minister of the two kingdoms, you did not summon me to hint or threaten. Nor to frighten me. You have seen the hand of God more than once in plagues and pestilence. Even a chamberlain cannot dispute his miracles."

Bialim frowned. "I see nothing supernatural in frogs and flies. As for the rest—illness, hailstorm, locusts—the land has been favored by these visitors before. Not quite so violently, perhaps, nor in such succession. But miracles, my wonder-worker?" He shrugged. "Coincidences."

"Is there a difference?" asked Moses.

Bialim threw up his hands. "He who argues with a Hebrew talks against eternity," he quoted. "But you are right in one thing. I did not call you here to threaten, but, as I said before, to talk freely. How far, I wonder, do your ambitions rise and what price do you set on them?"

Moses fought hard to control the angry stammering. "You know the answer to that question, Bialim."

Bialim rose suddenly. "You dare—!" Then he resumed his seat and the cords in his wrist relaxed. "Yes, I expected some such reply. It is curious that I should have been surprised by it. We are all creatures of mechanical reactions, making gestures we know are unreal but cannot repudiate. You may be an exception; you, at least, seem very sure of yourself."

"I, at least, am sure of my God."

Bialim, in the rare luxury of unbending, laughed. "To be rebuked by one in your position is an unusual experience. You interest me, Moses. I do not say you please me, mind you, but your rashness makes me regard you with an almost personal concern. As for religion, let us admit, as one practitioner to another, it is in a bad way. Too much loose talk and too many so-called democratic ideas. The temples of the gods have come upon evil times; their courts are a road for common feet. It is the foreign element that's to blame for this neglect of priests. I have heard that your people are responsible for the heresy that they can talk to their God direct, without mediators. I may tell you privately," Bialim lowered his voice, "the Pharaoh has twice been on the point of freeing some of the Hebrews, but each time your people—or your God, if you will—have done something to harden his heart.

"Our opinions on everything else may differ, Bialim," said Moses with an eye that was frank though not kindly, "but I am sure we agree as to who is responsible for the state of the King's heart—or his change of it."

Bialim allowed his enjoyment of the duel to show itself in a greater display of blackened teeth. "I don't suppose there's any use tempting you with a priesthood in Zoan? No, I thought not. I'm prepared to offer more. Let me say at once that I can surmise your plans. You hope to take advantage of the military situation. The Hittites continue to press down upon us from the north; that group of Hebrews who call themselves Khabiri have occupied Palestine. Canaan is the goal of the Semites. You must have seen parts of the migration when you were in Mitanni. That, most likely, is what determined you to come back to Egypt, rouse the slaves, and get them to

join their fellows in an attack on Palestine. As a separate adventure you know it is sure to fail; as part of an eastern movement you depend on the other tribesmen. You are, very likely, in the service if not the pay of the Hittites themselves. Wait!" as Moses lifted an expostulating hand. "You haven't heard my offer. Word has probably reached you of the strained relations between the priesthood and the army. We of Amen are beginning to maintain our own militia. This is the proposal: I think I can prevail upon the Pharaoh to allow half of your people to leave their labors if the other half swear allegiance to him as armed mercenaries. Meanwhile, pending further negotiations, I would be willing to declare a truce."

"And if we cannot agree to the terms?" asked Moses, tonelessly.

"Then," continued Bialim with unruffled delight in bargaining, "I have an alternative suggestion. The Pharaoh will, I believe, consent to the departure of all the men and wives of the Hebrews, if," he added carelessly, "as a pledge of their eventual return, the children be left in Egypt. This should not prove a detriment, for you will return to find a new generation fully grown and fed at the state's expense. And if you do not return"—he shrugged—"the relief from parenthood may prove a welcome. Nor need you suffer loss. The Hebrew women, so runs the rumor among the lower order of priests, are lively—and fertile."

Moses fought himself for words. The throat was gripped in an unseen vise. Then, after a convulsive minute, "Glory over me!" he burst out. "You think—! You dream—!"

"Say it," urged Bialim. "I always suspected your hu-

mility was false. There's no anger like that of a meek man. Don't be afraid. Out with it."

And out it came. The invisible fingers left his glottis; the lips were barely able to shape the wind that rushed through them.

"It is you who are afraid. All of you, high-priest and peasant alike; all Egypt is crying in the darkness. Your civilization is bright and proud, but your rituals are black with fear. You dwell in death; your religion is a worship of it. You are a race of undertakers. Akhnaton, whom you martyred, told how your priests, like vultures, fattened on the body of the dead and the soul of the living. You wonder why I should not be afraid to say this? Because I have found, Bialim, that fear is not an emotion; it is only the lack of one. It is a hole, an ignorance, the last superstition—like death. But I am filled with a surety that you, Bialim, think you can do without, even while you use intrigue and every form of subtlety as a substitute. I tell you, as sure as heaven is high above earth, as sure as apples ripen and fall without your leave, so sure will Egypt fall in spite of your plans. It will be told in the ears of your sons and your sons' sons that a judgment was rendered, the like of which Egypt had not known since it became a nation. Ignorance is your element, darkness of the spirit. So be it. You shall have darkness multiplied; cloud upon cloud of fear made visible. You shall have gloom until you cannot breathe in it and gasp for light."

"Bravo!" mocked Bialim. "The stutterer has found his tongue. Eloquence and prophecy—from the hitherto speechless! A miracle at last! I shall begin to take some stock in your God if this continues. Meanwhile," he added with a more menacing quiet, "I have been sufficiently en-

tertained for the day. No; I shall not have you killed—yet. I have drawn your poison; your fangs can harm no one now. The more you hiss, the surer will the foot descend. And not on you alone. You are all under my heel. Be thankful that you have a few hours before tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, Bialim, you will not find us," said Moses, in his ordinary stammering voice.

"What!" jeered the chamberlain. "Do you hope to escape overnight? Where do you imagine *we* will be?"

"You will be lost," replied Moses, "and there will be no need for the children of Israel to hurry."

"Madmen and ministers must be suffered to live, according to the code of Semti," said Bialim. "And when one is both, he is doubly protected. Therefore, until tomorrow, go in peace."

A servant blocked Moses in the doorway. Bialim glared at the intrusion.

"Droppings of a dog," he yelled, "who called you? What are you doing here?"

"Dispenser of the gods, protector of the poor," cried the ash-faced man, falling to his knees. "Take shelter. The watcher in the second tower sent me. The *khamsin!*"

DARKNESS

1

NATH's description of the *khamsin* is, on the face of it, the most trustworthy of all his writings. For once he seems to have encountered a phenomenon so startling in itself that no elaboration could heighten the effect. He is content with a colored phrase or two, such as his statement that "the black wind did not descend from heaven but blew up out of the bowels of earth, for its home was hell." The darkness was evidently not of the kind usually associated with the Egyptian sirocco; it seems to have been accompanied by a sandstorm of considerable duration. "It was a darkness that could be felt," writes Nath with every indication of veracity, "a thick darkness that scorched the hands and stung the eye. The blind storm ran up and down the streets, filling the air with the dust of graves, penetrating the innermost rooms so that the Egyptians could not see one another, neither rose any from his place for three days." When one considers the season and adds to it the enervating blast of south wind, Nath's summary is almost temperate.

The ninth plague seems to have lasted about a week, al-

though its intensity was spent after the fourth day. Extraordinary in character, it must have been confined in area. The worst manifestations were in and about Thebes; its northernmost reach was in the form of a secondary depression in the outskirts of Bubastis. Thus it may be seen that those in Goshen escaped all except the hot, cloudy aftermath.

2

It was during the third dark day that the epidemic was discovered. "The sickness flew in the feathers of the wind; death lay coiled in every grain of sand," says Nath. The germs must have been dormant ever since the coming of the flies—many cases of paralysis had been reported months ago—but as the hot darkness increased, individual tragedies grew to proportions of a national calamity. Children who had been playing the previous day were suddenly deprived of the use of their legs; infants in the cradle were seized with strange convulsions and left impotent. The mortality was startlingly high. Scarcely an Egyptian family was unaffected.

3

The pounding on the door tore Bialim from the deepest levels of sleep. He sprang up with the irritability of the too suddenly roused.

"What is it?" he called. "Where's Akiza?"

"It's I, Jambres. Your body-servant must have deserted his post. Open the door."

"Well," said Bialim surlily as he did so. "What else? You've got some unpleasant thing to say. I thought so. The Nubians?"

"No, highness. The Pharaoh."

"What's the child want now?"

"It's *his* child. The baby had a seizure a few hours ago. Convulsions and—other things. It died at midnight."

"What am I to do about it? Isn't the Kher-heb there?"

"Yes. But the Pharaoh is crying for you. And his servants and the women are making him worse with their howling. Anything may happen if he isn't quieted. The guard's already saying—"

"All right; I'll go. And the next Pharaoh," he spat, "won't be a boy or a makeshift. I—"

"You'd better hurry. The confusion seems to be growing." Bialim's appearance added to it.

The palace was in an uproar. Mixed with the sobs and outcries came bursts of crazy laughter. No one noticed that the body-servant Akiza, pride and first-born of his father, lay in the corridor. A broken neck, said Horemheb to his lieutenant, insures a quiet sleep.

4

The heads of the units made a rough semicircle about the two men; Mahali, Korah and Lothan shifted uneasily in front, Joshua stood straight and nerveless as a spear.

Moses had finished assigning the duties to each.

"That's all until tomorrow," he concluded. "You're sure you understand where to bring the goats, Mahali? And, Lothan, remember to see that your division meets Zachri's above the inlet instead of below as we first planned. And, Joshua, you won't forget— But of course not; you forget nothing." The boy's gratification broke through his self-imposed training.

"Oh, Chief—" he cried and immediately froze into disciplined immobility.

"Anything else?" ruminated Moses. "Yes. Aaron, you'd better repeat your instructions for the sacrifices and the rest of the religious ordinances."

Aaron nodded. He had, at first, resented Moses' air of command with its assumption of leadership. But, in the last few months, an unspoken agreement had been recognized. Moses was to control the strategy and general campaign of movement; Aaron was to direct the religious life of the community and establish its ceremonials. Moses might appoint the captains but, when the time came, Aaron could name his own priests.

Aaron spoke. "Jahveh has willed that our liberation which he is about to grant us be commemorated. Make the sacrifices annually, and keep a record of these ceremonies for your children. First, as the symbol of our deliverance into a new life, we will henceforth make this month Abib, the Month of Green Ears, the first month of the new year. Since Israel is beginning over again, this month shall remain the beginning of months for us." He prompted himself, re-rolling the papyrus.

"I will run over the matter of ceremony once more. Each household is to gather; every man is to be clothed as though ready for the journey. Every family is to sacrifice a lamb. If the household is too small or unable to afford a lamb by itself, let him share one with his neighbor. Be sure that the lamb is a male of the first year and without blemish. The slaying of the lamb shall signify you have given up idolatry and no longer worship the ram of Amen. To commemorate the darkness that threw Egypt into confusion, the lamb shall be killed in the evening.

And, before you eat it, you shall sprinkle blood on the lintel and posts of your houses. The blood shall be a token that you are of the chosen, and that the angel of death which entered the doors of the Egyptians has passed over you. Then, you shall roast the paschal lamb and eat it, letting nothing of it remain until morning, to show that nothing on earth is wasted. With it you shall eat bitter herbs, wild lettuce and harsh endive, to recall the bitter years of slavery. You shall also eat unleavened bread, for fermentation is corruption. And you are to eat this new bread in the newness of your life, and the feast is to be observed for seven days." He stopped. Then, as an afterthought:

"And when your children say to you, 'What is meant by this service?' you shall answer, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the children of Israel in Egypt and delivered our houses.' And you will not forget—"

Aaron's last sentences had been battling against a growing clamor; the final one was wholly lost. Joshua went to investigate with soldierly decorum. He returned a breathless boy.

"It's Egyptians, Chief! A platoon of soldiers! And what looks like a general with them."

Panic declared itself in every face but two.

"We're caught," gasped Mahali with hopeless fatalism.

"Not yet!" shouted Joshua. "We'll have a try at them first."

"Nonsense," said Moses. "Call them in."

"You won't have to call," said Aaron. "Here they come."

A voice, brusque and violent, cried "Wait!" and the

general came through the circle alone. He reminded Moses of Amenophis in stature, thick-legged, barrel-chested, but there was nothing patrician in the low, superstitious brow. The hands, too, were the hands of a laborer, a laborer who had stopped working. The jaw was protuberant and massive. Moses suddenly realized that the mouth had just been fixed in that mask of cruelty, and that the brutal lips were strained to conceal a coarse good-humor. The voice, however, continued peremptory.

"Which of you is the man called Moses?" He looked first at Aaron, then away from him to where Moses was standing. "Ah—of course. There's no mistaking you. I always make it a rule to get as close to the enemy as possible before beginning hostilities. Well, here we are." He grunted with what tried to suggest anger, but sounded more like satisfaction. Then, still staring at Moses, he was silent.

"You see we are unarmed," said Aaron.

"What?" said Horemheb abstractedly. "Yes, yes. Of course. Can't cut you down like grass. Of course not." He was silent again. Then, as if embarrassed by Moses' eye, "I must see you alone. At once."

Moses shook his head. "I have no secrets from my associate." He indicated Aaron. "Nor from my assistant." His gesture brought in Joshua. "But it is I alone who am responsible—"

"Never mind that now," growled the Egyptian. "All right; let these two stay. Oh, you needn't be afraid. The rest of you are safe as long as I am. Go on." He dismissed them as though he had given the order to break ranks. Reënforced by a nod from Moses, the command was

effective. He turned to Moses and, without preliminaries, made the sign of obeisance.

"My name is Horemheb," he began in another voice, in which humility was unconcealed. "I was born a commoner; I am from Hetsuten in upper Egypt, where we still are simple enough to reverence the gods. Chance and a few enemies have made me general of the armies; my soldiers would make me deputy governor—and more—if I let them. But I am afraid. Yes, I admit to you what I would confess to no one in the kingdom. I am afraid. Our gods are displeased with us; our priests are false priests. They foul the temples and the gods have withdrawn in disgust. You are a great magician; you can do anything. That is why I would allow no one to deliver a message; that is why I came to you myself."

"I am no magician," smiled Moses, "and can do nothing by myself. It is only the government of God—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Horemheb with pious haste. "Your god is a powerful god, one of the most potent in existence. I give him every honor. But he is not mine; and I am too old to turn from the gods of my youth, even though they now are shaken and powerless. I want them back," he pleaded with a pathos that sat curiously on the brutal mouth. "I would do anything to cleanse the temples of their impostors." He stopped abruptly. "Why should I conceal anything from you? You are a great magician and I am a fool of a soldier. Yes, your eyes tell me you've suspected it. Well, I have another reason for coming here. Our common hatred—Bialim."

"Bialim?" Moses' question was noncommittal.

"The high-priest, the Pharaoh-maker!" Horemheb drawled his contempt. "Oh, I could have him killed easily

enough. But the gods would not be satisfied. He must be humbled; he must fail in whatever he plans; he must be allowed no single victory. Then the gods will come back, even to Thebes, and they will give me a high place for restoring them."

"But what would you have me do?"

Horemheb lowered his voice. "Make your god leave Egypt. The older gods are like me, they are afraid of him."

"But," said Moses, as though explaining it to a child, "we need our God as much as you need yours. What would you have us do without him?"

Horemheb's face sharpened. Lines of action supplanted those of fear. It was an intensely practical voice that answered.

"As commander of the armies, I am aware of the movements of large bodies of natives and foreigners. I have been informed of the gathering of your family-groups, and I know what it means. I have not opposed it."

"Do you mean," said Aaron, "that no one will interfere with the next step?"

Horemheb ignored him, looking fixedly at Moses.

"How soon would you be ready to start?"

Moses looked as if a sword had been put in his hand. "Tonight," he said. "The groups have assembled and are waiting the word. Only a few of them are armed—mostly with mallets and spades, things they've worked with."

Horemheb grinned indulgently. "You won't need them. Not, at least, in Egypt. My word is a better weapon. There will be orders for your safety to the border. Let this scarab of Ptah accompany you. No one will dispute your way. And this necklet, you must take this, too.

Don't," he hurried on as Moses waved it back, "don't refuse it. It is a holy thing, the amulet of Maat. Kings have worn it; it is a true talisman. Maybe," he added with a simple shrewdness, "it will placate your god. If he cannot love the giver, at least he will not rise against me. You *will* take your God, won't you?"

"Yes," said Moses, "and the bones of our forefather Joseph as well."

"That's right," nodded Horemheb. "Honor the bones of your ancestors. It's our first commandment. Then your god will have no excuse to remain in Egypt." The voice made another sudden transition from the devout to the pragmatic. "What route do you plan to take?"

Moses determined to conceal nothing. He said:

"Our southernmost extreme is the district of On. It is settled chiefly by the children of Zebulun. They will move first in a northerly direction. The Simeonites near Bubastis will proceed southward. The two branches will collect the other tribes on the way in a fan-shaped sweep in this direction. From here as a center, we will proceed eastward past Thuu, bearing somewhat north until we come to Succoth."

"Succoth? Thukut, of course. You still use the Semitic name for it. But, if you'll take an old campaigner's advice, you'll not go by way of Thuu, but take the other side of the river. That will bring you direct to Per-Tum—Pithom, I think you call it. Do your men know the place?"

"They should. Their fathers built it."

The irony was lost on Horemheb, absorbed in his strategy.

"At any rate, you'll be able to renew your supplies there. And avoid long marches wherever you can. I've

found them hard enough on trained soldiers, and when you have such a mixed multitude unused to travel— But I forget you are a great prophet and wonder-worker. Forgive a soldier and a loud-mouthed fool. I came here to ask your aid, and here I am giving advice! Forgive me. Prophesy for me. Say that you and darkness will leave the land before we are all dead men." The veteran was a credulous child again, a child speaking in an incongruously bass voice. "My men will help if you need them. And so farewell. But before I leave, give me your blessing."

Moses could not deny him.

"You are a mighty spirit," Horemheb repeated, "and the power you serve is mighty and terrible. But," he added with an effort at jocularity, "you will be sure not to leave any of your god behind."

"We will be gone before morning," said Moses.

EXODUS

1

Nath's record gives us the tensity of the next few hours. Though obviously written in retrospect, the brief sentences, the sharp summoning of facts, the lack of by-play, recreate the very atmosphere of haste.

And the tribe of Zebulun moved suddenly at midnight. And the others followed, like squadrons of homing birds, toward Mizraim. They took what they had and were gone. Those without goods, borrowed raiment and gifts from the Egyptians, jewels of silver and jewels of gold. And the Egyptians said, it is a small price to pay.

The people could not tarry nor could they prepare food. They took the dough before it was leavened and did not stop to remove it from the kneading-troughs, but bound up the kneading-troughs with their clothes. And as they carried the uncooked paste through the morning, the sun warmed it and baked it upon their backs. And for a month of days they ate the unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought out of Egypt.

2

Evening arranged itself with slow precision. The tenantless plain accepted the few shadows indifferently; a broad river held the light longer here. Date-palms in solemn groups of threes shed twilight from their sloping leaves. But tonight the leisurely progress of dusk was disturbed. A distant ram's horn invaded it, then another; then a discord of drums, men's voices, animal cries. As it drew nearer, the chaos resolved into separate sounds. Quiet was unhoused from the smallest crevice. Sheep, driven all day with cruelly brief intervals for cropping, were indignant; asses, goaded against their fixed ideas, were more voluble than ever; children complaind on an ever-rising pitch; the keepers were louder than their cows.

"What a babel!" said Aaron. "It's like what was left out of Noah's ark! Is this the place?"

"Yes," said Moses. "Give them the stop-signal, Joshua. Some of the leaders are going beyond."

Joshua struck the cymbal, letting it reverberate until it had been answered twelve times, and gave orders for pitching the tents.

In comparison to what followed, the previous din was like a leaf's murmur. Commands collided against each other; the simplest direction was snarled in confusion. Men detailed to divide the encampment were helplessly in the rear. The fire-makers were telling an impatient world to hold its tongue, and how could you expect a fire when all the wood was soaked. The women of Benjamin were eloquent in their denunciation of the driver who had lost the salt crossing the stream. The tentpoles were late in ar-

riving. The ropes did not fit. A little, cloud-colored donkey broke away and caused as much disturbance as an elephant. Children, relieved from the tedium of travel, insisted on playing in the centers of most activity. A small tornado broke out in the families of Asher when it was learned that all the dried vegetables had been left behind; a greater storm ensued when they were discovered. An inexpert hewer of Levi, mistaking his toe for a peg, caused a suspension of work until the wound was staunched and prayed over. Kettles steamed and voices demanded to know what was the use of wearing your body and soul out cooking food for people who didn't eat it? In another section voices inquired fretfully were they expected to starve after such a grueling day and would supper never be ready? A mother suddenly realized her youngest was gone, had been drowned, trampled underfoot, kicked to death by the mules, eaten by wild beasts, kidnaped by desert sheikhs, stolen by jealous neighbors. Not until the leaders had been summoned and the curse of Jahveh invoked upon the murderers, was the child discovered sucking a stalk of sugar-cane it had found in another tent. Never had the dignity of night been so affronted.

"How can they keep it up?" asked Aaron.

"Animal spirits," replied Moses. "It won't last much longer."

"It's not the animal spirits I object to; it's the human ones."

"Be a little lenient with them. Remember it's the first night. Allow for change of scene, release of energy. But I don't have to tell you. Just being on the move is a little too much for them—eh, Joshua?"

"Yes, Chief," replied the lad, on whose red-brown hair,

which marked him from his fellows, the last of the sunset lay like a cap of fire. "We ought to remember what we're doing and how serious it is. But, after those months of planning and talking about it, to be on our way—just to be going somewhere, anywhere—is enough to make us shout. To think we've left the brickyards and the clay-pits for all this—" He swept the landscape with an all-embracing arm. "Why, it's like heaven on a holiday."

"Joshua," smiled Moses, "you must have been talking to Nath. If his influence spreads much further, this will be a pilgrimage of poets."

"Heaven forbid," said Aaron with a wry laugh. "But I know what he means. I suppose no night will ever be the same to them. They're not thinking of past or future—and they're glad of it."

"So am I. This hour never happened before. It is complete, unrelated to anything else. Yesterday is something that occurred to no one; tomorrow is too far off to be real. This space is untouched by time. And it is theirs . . . What is it, Lothan and—is it you, Korah?"

The two men saluted. Korah spoke.

"We can't manage our groups, so we've come to report. There's no controlling the youngsters and even the old men won't obey. Some of the families refuse to drive the tent-pegs and say they're going to sit up till morning."

"And all of the tribes are mixing, contrary to instructions," added Lothan. "No matter what we say, they won't keep to their own divisions. We've threatened them, but it's no good."

Moses answered. "Let them do as they please tonight. Tomorrow they will be ready for discipline. Formations need not be strict until we reach Pithom."

The men went back to their improvised and unruly settlements. Joshua went to add the day to his diary. Torches began to replace the afterglow. The steam of cooking successfully disputed the night-smells from the river.

"You are right," said Aaron. "They'll be quieter when they reach Succoth—if we ever get that far."

Moses' laugh was rounder than Aaron had suspected it could be.

" 'Once a priest, always a pessimist,' " he quoted with good-humored raillery. "We'll be there in two days. It's an easy march from here."

It was hours before the last beast could be tethered and the children quieted. Even then the night buzzed. Each camp-fire was a magnet of excitement; every torch outlined dozens of huge, gesticulating moths. Men from Reuben found surprising things in common with the descendants of Manasseh. Weavers haggled and called on the gods of Egypt and Israel to testify that all sons of Judah were born robbers. Second cousins discovered each other and fought over genealogies until they became mythical. Women from the south exchanged recipes and child-bearing details with their equally gifted sisters from the north. Dulcimers were produced and an occasional tamboura. One voice raised the nomad chant of Ishmael and the refrain leaped from every bonfire. A group of elders began and choruses revived the songs of Esau and Chodad and Zaavan and Nabaioth. Finally the women struck up the plaint and exultation of Sarah which had not been heard in Egypt for more than two hundred years.

That night no one cared to sleep.

Succoth, the place of tents. An appropriate name for a resting-place, thought Moses, watching the green plain stippling with white as cloths lifted, bellied in a wind of their own making, shrank, tightening into a field of pointed mushrooms. Here and there, more ambitious builders, or those not equipped with tents, had erected huts thatched with palm leaves. There was no counting them. My people, thought Moses, with a sense of power he had not felt in twenty years. It had returned to him when he first faced Bialim; with every step of the journey it had increased; it grew with each habitation that raised itself obedient to his thought. My people! Mine to command! The boy's dream had come true. Better than the dream. Not a tired disheartened country to rule, but an army, devoted, eager, looking to him for guidance. An army that, once across the border, would be shaped into a nation. His years were a contradiction; for all their recapture of youth, he felt patriarchal as he went to receive the obeisance of the elders.

Moses had permitted a week's stay under the palms and tamarisks of Succoth, a week to allow the newness of the adventure to wear off. "Besides," he said to Aaron, "let them enjoy the shelter of these days; there are hardships enough ahead." But a week of holiday had been sufficient for the Israelites. The multitudes were eager to move, to enter into their kingdom which they blandly assured one another must be around the corner. Reason was unavailing. They rejected the warnings of noons in oven-like passes, weeks of slow marches in the desert,

hostility of strangers and the more savage earth. "We left our homes to find our homeland," was the cry. "Let us go on." A week was worn in argument.

"It is time," said Moses to the elders. "We move tomorrow morning. The road runs along the river; we will continue northeast. Spies are already on their way to Pithom. Their report will determine our stay before we enter the wilderness."

"The wilderness?" said Eliasaph the road-maker. "Then you're not going to take the caravan route all the way? I mean the highroad the armies use into Canaan, the one Jacob's family took when he came to Egypt? It's the nearest."

"I know," said Moses. "But that will lead us through the land of the Philistines; and even Pagiel, man of war though he is, will admit unarmed laborers are scarcely fit for battle."

Pagiel blinked his one eye. "Give us a few months' discipline and a few fellows like young Joshua, and we'll be fit enough. As for arms—we'll make 'em. Why not?" He thrust the question at the others like a challenge.

"Why not," affirmed Eliasaph. "There's copper and other ore near Sinai across the border. The peninsula is full of mines."

"Then we agree," said Moses. "I don't want the people turning back at this stage, and changing their purpose through fear. Nor do I want our families cut to pieces. Gaza is garrisoned by Egyptian troops. Pithom is another story. I expect the messengers to return tonight. But, in any case, we take the road tomorrow with sunrise."

The report was unfavorable. Pithom was closed against

the Israelites. News of the exodus had traveled faster than the event, and the great store-city with its arms and granaries feared to open its gates to the Hebrews. Moses determined to push on.

The next three days were kind to the wanderers. The road paralleled the river; fish were plentiful; the sycamore-figs were ripe; even the unleavened bread had a pleasant crispness under the fragrant sky. The second day was notable for a flock of wild ducks descending to the water. Many of them were stoned before they could rise, and were stuffed and served before evening. The climax of good fortune came on the third day when one of the tribes discovered, along an abandoned irrigation ditch, a field of honey-sweet melons. "Not even the Pharaohs," wrote Nath, "feasted as richly as we along the river-banks of Succoth."

Progress was leisurely. Four nights later they encamped outside of Pithom which refused even to admit a delegation that came to barter for grain. Next morning they were again afoot and, late in the afternoon, reached Etham on the edge of the wilderness. Here Moses had them pitch their tents, warning the leaders they must be ready to leave at an hour's notice.

The scouts were not encouraging. They had heard a rumor that a body of unidentified Egyptian soldiery had left Zoan and was proceeding south. There was no longer a question as to the northerly route; it was cut off in any event. The desert lay ahead. Asia was just on the other side. Toward the south were mountain passes and the Red Sea, an easier retreat but more hazardous to occupy. It was a sorry choice, made still more difficult by the knowledge that everything depended on it.

Moses left the council and walked toward the ruins of the Khetem. This was one of the border-fortresses that Akhnaton had refused to defend. As he waited, Moses remembered the tablet that came telling of its destruction a dozen years ago. What was he waiting for, he asked himself, and could not answer. Yet he knew it was for something that would appear, something that would make plain where he was to go.

The sun was still the width of a hand above the horizon in a sky so saturated with light as to seem colorless. Gauzes of heat came between Moses and the shadow extending itself toward him. He stepped forward to see what projection of the ruin could throw so pointed a column of shade. It was as pronounced as a sign. Nothing that he could recognize. The broken wall was stunted and going back to the round stones from which it came. Possibly higher . . . Then Moses saw the cloud straight as a pillar. As he looked, it seemed to hang solidly, immovably above him. It was fringed with sun, as though with fire. Then it began to point, drifting slowly to the south.

An hour later, the tribes were moving southward to the passes between Migdol and the Red Sea.

THE SEA DIVIDES

1

In his account of the march from Etham, Joshua gives us hints of that accuracy of movement which, later, made him so eminent a soldier. This, it seems, was the first time he had been given a division to superintend and, though it consisted chiefly of provision-boys and muleteers, no general ever directed a campaign with a greater sense of importance. The boyish impetuosity, that trait so outstanding in his personal contacts, never appears in his "log." But the entries of the next few months reveal, in their increasing seriousness, how quickly the youth, matured by responsibility, changed into the man.

Joshua devotes no little space to the confusion at Succoth and dwells naïvely, and understandably, on his own part in marshaling the commissary into a kind of order. His account of the halt at Etham is the only one we have; Nath evidently did not regard the stop of sufficient duration to chronicle it. "We tried our first double-wing formation at Etham," Joshua writes. "Not successful. The animals continue to interfere. They will have to be kept in units by themselves if we are to make

progress. No time for more at Etham; orders came to strike south at once."

The next entry must have been made at a later date, for Joshua says nothing of the journey other than "A forced march brought us to Migdol." However, his description of the place is graphic. "We are now encamped before Pi-hahiroth, 'the House of the Serpent,' between high Migdol and the sea. It is not the best place for a bivouac. There is no outlet here. We are well hidden, but, if found, could be hemmed in by a few squadrons. The plain is basin-like and small. At the north, the foot of a mountain juts sharply and forms a defile easy to defend. Other mountains are immediately behind us, rendering approach from that quarter impossible. Men stationed in the watch-tower of Migdol command a view to the right; the sea forms a natural barrier to the left. We also occupy the height Baal-Zephon, using the old sanctuary as a look-out to the west. There is little likelihood of a surprise. The disadvantage is that in case of an attack, the only way out would be to retrace our steps, and the gorge could quickly be blocked. Moses belittles the danger. He says the men need rest and he is waiting for the spies to return before the next long march. I have appealed to Aaron, who says military tactics are outside his province and remarks I am growing cautious with age. I said nothing more. But I do not like this place. Have finally taught the boys from Simeon wedge-formation like the Hittites. Have thought of a way to strengthen the center by having the two bent wings pivot gradually forward and straighten as they turn. Will try it with the men from Benjamin tomorrow."

2

Aaron succeeded in disguising his impatience. He said, "We were worried, Moses, when you did not come back before dusk. The scouts returned two hours ago."

"I've been walking along the shore," said Moses. "Have you noticed two miles from here, how the sea narrows? The water is shallower than I suspected. But it's the tide that's strangest. Have you any idea how high it rises and falls?"

"I have not," said Aaron with an indifference more pointed than a reproof. "The messengers—"

"Of course," said Moses. "The messengers. What news?"

"The worst. We are being followed. Bialim, it seems, charged Horemheb with treason and called upon him to pursue the tribes. Horemheb refused. What happened next is not clear, but the spies say it looks like the beginning of another civil war. Three days ago, Bialim abandoned the temple, resolved to regain his prestige and pay off old scores. He found out that, instead of taking the main road to Gaza, we were still within the borders of Egypt. So he took to the field. His mercenaries are swift travelers and they are being reënforced by chariots from Zoan. That's the report."

"Chariots," said Moses. "That means they will be here tomorrow by noon. Do our people know this?"

"No. The messengers have talked to nobody but the elders and, in reply to questions, said there was no news."

"Good. Let them sleep soundly. Bialim himself, you

say. And I told him I should not look upon his face again. Well, he has come a long way to give me the lie."

The soliloquy was too much for Aaron. "Moses! You talk—and of sleeping soundly. In this trap! Do you realize where we are? Have you any hope of getting away? Any plan?"

"Yes to all your questions. I've been trying to forestall them. We won't move back, and we can't stop Bialim's chariots in any case. So we'll start toward the left tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? With Bialim's armed troops driving down on us now? And to the left? Do you mean along the sea, exposed to slaughter?"

"Not along the sea, Aaron, in the sea."

"You've gone mad!"

"Or rather, through the sea. Call Joshua and I'll explain it to you both. It's a chance. But if we can hold them off until the tide changes and if the weather's with us, we ought to be in Asia the next morning." Joshua entered, but Moses was already outlining his plan of action. His staff had traced a snaky figure upon the ground. "Here," he pointed, "is where we are. Two miles to the left, the sea thins out to the width of an ordinary river, forming a sort of estuary. It is seven or eight feet deep at this point. I know the district fairly well, and I've been watching the water. Tomorrow night is ebb tide. Now, if—" He broke off suddenly. "Joshua, are your boys ready for what may be a dangerous experiment?"

Joshua's eyes snapped. "Try us—I mean," he corrected himself with military decorum, "we are."

"I want them posted on the flank of the hill where

they can be seen by any one bearing down from the north. They will remain there, while the tribes receive orders to move. Not until the last of the tribes have left, are they to follow. Is that clear? And can I depend on it?"

Joshua's hand answered for him. He saluted.

3

Bialim's troops did not arrive until late afternoon. The rapid progress had been hard on the horses, the heat of the last two days excessive. His soldiers welcomed the clouds blowing in as they neared Pi-hahiroth; to them the dark sky was anything but depressing.

As soon as Bialim saw the watch-tower of Migdol, he knew his quarry had not escaped. Drawn up along the flank of the hill were the outposts. From this distance, he could not compute their numbers, but the evidence of encampment was enough. He rather regretted the enemy's lack of arms; it would be a massacre, not a battle. But even a massacre could be glorified when translated into a vengeance of Amen. Bialim considered. It was getting late to attack. These black clouds were bringing dusk on prematurely; his men had ridden themselves out. They would be fresh in the morning, lustier for action. There was no possibility of the Hebrews escaping. In another hour he would have them bottled up between the mountain-ridges and the sea. Bialim gave orders to encamp at the foot of the hill, blocking the pass. "You will advance after daybreak," he told them. "No quarter is to be given. The spoils," he added, "are yours."

4

The loud wind and tumbling sky had been disheartening enough to the Israelites; the appearance of the Egyptians completely unnerved them. Their sleep had been riddled with nightmare pursuits; they were tortured with dreams of paralyzed feet while horses of flame rushed up behind them. And now the dreaded war-chariots had come, sealing the one passage to safety. Breaking through regulations, groups of men and women whose panic did not need the support of numbers confronted Moses.

"What have we done to you that you do this to us?" they cried. The reproaches piled up. "Is this the way of the God of mercy? To save us from the hooves of the horses only to throw us under the wheels?" "Didn't we say to you, 'Let us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?' Weren't we better off serving our masters than being butchered in this godforsaken spot? Were there no graves in Egypt that you had to take us away to die in the wilderness?"

But Moses quieted them. "Go and rest," he said to the women wringing tragic hands. "Stand still," he said to the men running in circles of bewilderment. "Fear nothing. As for the Egyptians, take your last look at them now; you shall never see them again. Tomorrow at dawn you will go forth as safely as between walls."

The assurance in his voice and the light playing upon his forehead silenced them. They were quieted if not convinced when they went back to their gusty fires.

All night long the wind rose. At dawn it was a steady pressure from the east. The sky was solid with thunder-

heads piling upon each other, but the storm did not break. It was too dark for day to assert itself; prolonged night stood between the Egyptian camp and Migdol as the Israelites made their way along the sea. When they reached the narrows, the barrier of water had gone. Joshua, whose division was the last to ford across, gives a clear picture of what must have been a miracle of miracles to the others.

"The south-east wind," so runs Joshua's narrative, "had blown with such force that a great body of the shallow water had been driven toward the north-west. At the same time the tide reached its ebb and drew the under-waters southwards. The wind, continuing strong, kept the path for us. At no time was the water higher than our ankles. As the distance was less than a mile, the multitude crossed in five hours." Joshua cites the order of march, lists the division-chiefs, and resumes:

"The Egyptian scouts noticed our camp-fires go out shortly after dawn, before the Benjaminites reached the other shore. Their trumpets sounded the charge. Darkness must have delayed the troops, for they did not arrive at the channel until our last piece of baggage had passed over. Their horsemen followed at once, the chariots next. But the tide had begun to turn and the wind shifted. Then the storm broke."

One needs little to complete the picture. The waters seething about the axles, the rain lashing from above. The chariot-wheels clogging in the soft sand. The horses stampeding, breaking their traces and plunging furiously; the welter lit by lightning. The charge of waves intensified by veering winds; the sea returning, rushing in from every side. The struggle to be free of heavy armor; the mael-

strom of bodies and discarded weapons. The catastrophe is implicit in Joshua's sentences.

Comparison of Nath's account with Joshua's is curious, the more so since it reveals nothing in common but the subject. The difference is manifest in the treatment of small details; unlike the soldier, the scribe believed his function was to create rather than to preserve history. When Nath reaches a high moment such as the Red Sea crossing, he casts off the last encumbrance of reality and sweeps to his true element. In the original, this episode consumes seventy-two paragraphs of mounting rhetoric; only a few excerpts are necessary to show why Nath was the inspiration of every Talmudist.

And when they reached the sea that spat its cold fury in their faces, the children of Israel were full of fear and called down wrath upon Moses who prayed long and powerfully. Then Jahveh cut him short, saying, "Long prayers are good, but there are times it is better to be brief. Speak to the sea."

And Moses admonished the sea, bidding it uncover its secret paths. But the sea replied, "Who art thou to command me, for thou art only a man born of woman, while I am an element, knowing neither birth nor death. Besides, I will never take orders from a son of Adam, for I am older, having been conceived on the Third Day while he was born on the Sixth." Moses complained to Jahveh, saying, "The sea will not obey me." And Jahveh said, "What does the master do with an unruly servant?" "He beats him with a rod," replied Moses. "Why, then," said Jahveh, "dost thou delay?"

Thereupon Moses lifted his rod which had been fashioned from the Tree of Life on which was inscribed the

secret Name, and beat the back of the sea which fled, howling, before him. Waves trampled each other in their haste to avoid being whipped; the currents turned hot and cold in confusion. And the waters parted, fleeing before him on either side, making a broad avenue of dry land. And not alone were the waters of the Red Sea divided, but all the water in heaven and earth: water standing in wells, or lying in casks, or emptied into troughs, or stagnant in ponds, or waiting in a goblet; all the waters everywhere divided in obedience to the magic of the Name.

And when the children of Israel entered into the midst of the sea, they were on dry ground, for the waves stood up in a great wall on their right hand and on their left. The walls of water met above their heads, forming a vault that diffused a light bluer than the heavens'. Twelve paths opened through the sea, one for each tribe, each fairer than the other. The floor threw up colored stones; flying fish with rainbow wings shuttled among liquid trees; plants of precious coral grew along the sides; rare sea-fruit, too delicate for earth, ripened in their hands. And, through the brackish tide, a stream of limpid water flowed, cool to the lips and sweeter to the tongue than new milk and almonds.

All the while, angels of Jahveh went over against the camp of the Egyptians and they were a cloud and a darkness before it. Not until the last of the Lord's chosen had stepped out of the bed of the sea, did the pillar of smoke depart and the light of day return. And the Egyptians pursued and went in after them to the sea's midst, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And battle was joined between the gods of the Egyptians and the Lord of Hosts. The arrows of the charioteers were an-

swered by arrows of rain that blinded them. The swords of the Egyptians were shivered by lightning; the torches they hurled were blown back by the wind. The Egyptians advanced with horns and drums, but the Lord silenced them with the thunder of his voice. He took off their chariot wheels and destroyed the chariots utterly.

And Moses stretched forth his rod again and invoked the unnameable Name. And the waters charged in huge battalions, boiling and foaming about the Egyptians till their breast-plates cracked and the hooves of the horses dropped from their feet. The breath of Jahveh blew from a new quarter, and sea and wind grappled together, tossing the horsemen about like lentils in a saucepan. Their enchanters raised up demons and drew symbols on the shore; but none could escape. When the ten measures of magic allotted to the world had been exhausted, and a few of the Egyptians had gained the land, the sea rushed after them and pulled them back. But neither earth nor sea would bury them. The sea cried to earth, "Take the flesh that sprang from you." And earth retorted, "Keep the clay you have drowned."

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day. And the tribes gathered up the arms and weapons of the Egyptians which sea and wind cast on the other shore, and the people were armed by the hand of the Almighty. And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses.

BOOK FOUR

"The mountain of inheritance"

DESERT

1

First the drums punctuated the morning, then the cymbals tore a great hole in the air. The people assembled slowly for thanksgiving, each tribe moving to its appointed place. Twelve concentric rings were formed: twelve half-circles of men, twelve half-circles of women. They faced each other, awaiting the signal from the three who stood before a rude altar on which fire, made of drift-wood and chariot-wheels, was burning. The trained cantors of Levi made an arc within the ring, and as they announced the melody, the twelve tribes repeated words and music, echoing the refrain. A single voice began the hymn of glorification, while Aaron spilled blood upon the stones and Moses scattered sea-salt over the flames. The voice fumbled, felt for the pitch, and unfolded like a spiral of smoke.

Sing to the Lord, who hath triumphed gloriously:
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

This was the chorus. Women's voices, strengthened by harps and nebels, carried it an octave higher; the men shouted it back. The solo continued the strophe.

The Lord is my strength and my song,
And he is become my salvation.
He is my God and I will house him;
My father's God and I will praise him.

Aaron's voice then took command; the drums pronounced the rhythm and the men roared the chant of victory.

Jahveh is a man of war;
Jahveh is his name.
Praise Jahveh!

Pharaoh's chariots and his host
He split like a dead tree;
His chosen captain is a ghost
Drowned in the Red Sea.
The depths have covered every one;
They sank to the bottom as a stone.

Jahveh is a man of war;
Jahveh is his name.
Praise Jahveh!

Once more the multitude united to raise the chorus. Even the children knew it now.

Sing to the Lord, who hath triumphed gloriously:
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Then Moses held up his staff and, keeping it pointed to the pit of heaven, he intoned the second strophe in a less regular measure.

Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power:
Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.
And in thy greatness, from thy height, thou hast overthrown them that rose against thee:
Thou sentest forth thy wrath, consuming them like stubble.

With the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together;
The flood stood upright as an heap;
The depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

Then the choristers of Levi sounded a new refrain. And the psalm, feeling its way, thrust itself up with certainty. It took hold of the air, filling it like a tree, the phrases blossoming, the notes opening and turning like leaves.

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like thee?
Glorious in holiness, fearful in praises,
Terrible in wonders,
Thou stretchedst out thy hand—and earth swallowed them.

Now it was the women's turn to sing alone. Miriam, in her prophetess' robes, struck a timbrel with both hands over her head and a hundred and forty-four virgins went out from the twelve rings. Circling about her, they shook their instruments, singing as they danced. The melody was gentler as the words looked forward to peace. It soothed the space still quivering with the men's rough joy.

Thou in thy mercy hast led the people thou hast redeemed;
Thou hast guided them in strength to a holy habitation.
Kingdoms shall hear and fear thee:
They shall wonder in Palestine, the dukes of Edom shall be amazed,
The inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.

The voices swelled, gathering all voices and elements in a triumphant climax.

Thou shalt bring them in,
And plant them in the mountain of inheritance;
The peace, O Jahveh, thou hast made to dwell in,
The sanctuary, O Lord, thy hands have established.

But the men would not have it so. It was too calm, too womanly a note to end on. Their spirit clung to the warlike chant; their voices grew hoarse with it. Over and over, the chorus answered itself. When words gave out, feet and drumsticks mimicked them. Hollow palms said it over and over.

Sing to the Lord who hath triumphed gloriously:
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Jahveh is a man of war;
Jahveh is his name.
Praise Jahveh!

2

Two weeks in the desert dried the song in their throats. Over the peninsula of Sinai a wind blew, cooling their

brows but burning the skin. At first the riffled dunes were a welcome change, but, after the third day, the smooth-shining curves and straw-colored sands blinded the travelers. Ahead of them a stone plateau lifted barren sides. What vegetation there was only accentuated the atmosphere of drought. Occasional tufts of grass brushed against the animals like bundles of wire.

Three more days were spent in a region of soft sand, facing the thrust of spear-like highland. After the encampment in this waste of Shur, the suffering began. Faces were wind-stung and sand-cut. The change to hard ground, hailed at first as a blessing, proved an added curse, for the road was carpeted with flints so finely polished by blown sand that every foot of progress was penalized. Children accustomed to bruises, ran to their mothers with bleeding feet; donkeys, used to any footing, complained continually. Lack of water, worst of hardships, suddenly made itself felt. The supply had run short, the springs were far separated. Making their way along the wall of the plateau, bands of men would rush to the few moist places and dig into the ground, baling up a liquid which, settling in the cupped hand, was chiefly mud. Unfit to drink, they spat it out; later in the day, when the sun parched and no track of moss hinted at moisture, they longed for it.

Song came to their lips again when, toward evening of the twelfth day, they sighted the well at Marah. But it died, and profanation took its place when they found the water was bitter. The thirstiest could not swallow it; even the cattle refused. Murmuring against the leaders, an ageless characteristic of mobs, increased to accusation. "Our rescue," said some, "raised our spirits; the leaders, helped

by the desert, will break them down." "Death by the enemy," said others, "would have been better, for it would not have been gradual. It is not death which is terrible, but dying." On all sides came the cry, "What shall we drink?"

But Moses did not heed the murmurs. He said, "Destroy bitterness with bitterness." When they failed to understand, he told them to drop branches of the sour laurel into the well. Then he gave directions for drawing up the surface of the water which was stagnant; and after the well was purged, the waters sweetened and the people were satisfied. Some of them even praised God.

But they found condemnation easier than praise. The road to Elim, along a dried-up river-bed, helped them to forget everything except their difficulties. The path in this wadi was set with stones too irregularly placed to avoid. But there was a more active malice in the ground. Scorpions were at home here and reptiles that had a particular lust for sheep but did not disdain children. Nath says that the snakes here were so deadly that "if one of them merely glided over the shadow of a passing bird, the bird fell without a flutter."

The encampment at Elim was almost as disappointing. They had heard much of this oasis and when, after two months' journeying southward, they saw what seemed a forest of date-palms, feet quickened to a livelier measure. But the grove turned out to be some twenty stunted palms from which birds or other trespassers had stripped the few dates. The celebrated fountains were an even greater disillusion. True, there were twelve of them, but not even the most imaginative romancer could call them fountains. Discouraged springs at the best; a dozen damp holes from

which no rill bubbled or gathered enough power to reach the roots of the trees.

Worse followed as they went on. The wadi grew narrower; its baking walls, unlike a river-road, were more like a trough of fire. The problem of food was growing acute. Cattle could not be spared; the supply of milk was lessening every day. The sheep had contracted an illness and the Israelites were forbidden to eat diseased flesh. Those who broke the rules suffered more than conscience-pangs. The threat of starvation became an immediate possibility. Fear of the future troubled them most. Wilderness, arid and devastating, stretched before them, a wide but a more cruel prison than Egypt. "We were promised freedom," they cried, "and we are not even free of hunger. We have been deceived; the Promised Land is no land, only a promise that will not be kept. Would to God we had died during the plagues in Egypt. Then, at least, we ate bread to the full. Would to God we had died a decent death. But you have brought us into this wilderness to kill the whole assembly with hunger."

Moses' first impulse was to let those who whined make their way back to Egypt alone. But, growing more familiar with the fickleness of a multitude, he summoned the loudest.

"You will have freedom," he assured them, "but not until you know how to use it. There is a price for the cheapest article, but you are not willing to sacrifice a thing for the most valuable. You are being asked to pay a small amount—a little patience, a little fortitude—and already you throw up your hands and cry you are being robbed. Freedom is more than a gift, it is a burden; you must have souls great enough to bear it. Make yourselves

fit. Feed on suffering. Cease to be like cattle, bellowing until a bucket of food is put before them. You can always be slaves again. Slaves, like sheep, are fed regularly. Go back to your tents and meditate. Strengthen yourselves."

He spent the next two hours in prayer.

Toward evening, the quails came up, flying northwards from Africa in a state of such exhaustion that they were easily caught. Even the boys brought in sufficient to give themselves the air of hunters. A flock of Arabian partridges added to the game-bags. Flesh came into camp again.

And in the morning they discovered manna.

3

Those who had camped in the grove of tamarisks first noticed the pale yellow nodules that covered the ground. A child, seeing crows peck at them, put a few in its mouth and found the taste good. Soon every one was at work scooping the amber-like grains. Whether a man gathered more or less than his share did not matter, for it was all collected and meted out, three pecks for each person. Nath explains the origin of the name thus: "*Man-hu?*" *cried some, meaning* "*What is it?*" "*Man-hu?*" "*Manna,*" *others replied,* "*Manna, the food from Heaven.*"

In the amplification of such a subject Nath is happiest. Unfettered by ordinary hypotheses, he erects upon the theme a set of variations which some have regarded as oriental improvisings, and others as uninspired audacities.

The manna fell from the second heaven where the angels, continually at work combining new elements, ground the miraculous food in mills of azure. It fell with the dawn;

and the children of Israel, beholding its descent, saw it reach earth in the form of seven rainbows. These arches radiated seventy colors that have no names, and the light from them, outshining the sun, changed into twice as many perfumes, making the desert blossom like a pleasure-garden.

The ground had been prepared for the miracle. During the night a slow wind swept the floor of the wilderness. Then a gentle rain fell, washing it clean. Then came the morning dew which the wind and the dawn-cold turned into hoar-frost that sparkled like set jewels. Finally, to prevent worms from settling on the manna, the frozen dew formed not only a cloth for the feast but a cover for the food, sealing it in an envelope of ice.

At first as many-colored as the rainbows which deposited it, the manna changed to a golden hue under the morning sun. No larger than coriander seeds, each grain was sweeter than a hive of honey. Moses called it "The Bread of the Angels," not only because it was prepared by them, but because the heavenly ones need nothing else for sustenance. It was the strength-giving qualities of manna which made the unequipped Israelites conquer their armed enemies.

Most wonderful of all was the taste of this golden meal. The flavors of manna were as various as its original hues. No one needed to cook it, for the touch of it on the tongue was sufficient to appease hunger. As it entered the lips, men had a foretaste of the coming banquet on the day when Leviathan and Behemoth are eaten by the chosen ones in heaven. A man had only to place a grain of manna against his palate, think of his favorite dish, and immediately his mouth was filled with the savor of it. Each was

granted his desire according to his age. To children, it had the smoothness of sweet milk and strained honey; to youths, the smack of red meat and strong wine; to girls, the comfort of curds and almond-cakes; to the weary, the vigor of green corn and wafers steeped in cordial; to the sick, the healing of barley-bread and olive-oil; to the old, the forbidden fruit of their youth.

For the skeptical and those impatient with such high-flying imagery, there is Joshua's concise record. Food was undoubtedly important, but it had no esthetic properties for Joshua. At the time of Nath's elaborate celebration of manna, the young captain is busy organizing a new battalion and his references are incidental to the main concern. "Finally succeeded in getting both flanks to operate evenly," writes Joshua. "Men complained their dullness due to lack of food. That has been remedied now since they have found what they term 'manna.' It is plentiful, and an active man can gather three pounds in a day. It is of two sorts. The coarser is a kind of resin blown from tamarisk trees; the smaller and whiter globules are dropped by insects of the wilderness and vary in size from a pin-head to a pea. Both kinds seem to have nutritive value and are not unpleasant to the taste. Hope the wheeling columns move faster tomorrow, otherwise will not show this movement to Moses until certain of it. Outposts of Amalek carrying off cattle at night. Will double the guard."

AMALEKITES

1

And so, avoiding long marches, the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness and went on toward Rephidim. Joshua mentions an encampment at Dophkah and another at Alush, although Nath speaks of neither. There was little to record until they neared Rephidim. It was a cheerless, rocky bivouac. Here the sun struck like a flail and the murmuring broke out again. Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben seem to have been ring-leaders in what began as nagging criticism, grew into a policy of complaint, and developed into a conspiracy. They approached the main tent with thirty others.

"Why," they chided Moses, "have you led us so far out of our way? Why do you choose desert paths instead of the highroad? Why have you exposed us to dangers instead of bringing us northward into the country promised?"

"You know the answers, Dathan. Abiram, you have not framed your question for reply. You know well enough that we have avoided the main roads because of Egyptian forces at Maghara; that all Canaan is at war; that,

whatever discomforts confront you here, they are nothing compared with the perils you would encounter there."

"Let us judge of that," said Dathan. "The African hills are behind us. We are no longer a body of beaten slaves; we are an independent nation."

"Are you?" said Moses, ignoring the truculence.

"Are we not a free people now?" said Dathan less belligerently, but with edged inquiry.

"That is still to be proved," replied Moses. "You were among those loud in your talk of freedom and silent in your acts to establish it. Free men do not wait for others. Free men take freedom into their own hands. Answer me now. Why do you not quiet the impatience of the people? Why do you not satisfy their insatiable thirst?"

"Can we draw water from the rock?" they countered sullenly.

"Why not?" said Moses. "If you have strength enough." He looked them over twice, then added, "And faith."

He took his rod and strode to the crevice where his tent was pitched. Bowlders and earth toppled perilously above him as he called "Look!" to the group watching him with trepidation. Planting himself on a stone shelf four feet high, he struck at a rock over his head. After the third blow, he dislodged it and a stream of water trickled to the ground.

"A miracle," cried Hur. The elders echoed him as the crowd drew back, fearing to touch water procured in such fashion.

"Drink," said Moses. "It is pure. Even you," he turned to Dathan and Abiram, "cannot muddy it. Call the spring

Massah and Meribah, for here you tempted me to strike. But drink from it."

Lips were loud with praise and guzzling. Moses called to Aaron across the drill-ground.

"Look at them. Listen to the chosen of God. And an hour ago they were ready to stone me!"

"What do you expect of them?" said Aaron with a cynical shrug.

"Everything," said Moses.

2

Things were not well at Rephidim. The depredations, in spite of double vigilance, were growing. The hand of the Amalekites suddenly became apparent. At first their opposition was felt in the loss of a few cows, but now aggression was open. Part of the baggage had been cut off; two families of stragglers had been waylaid, robbed and murdered. It was plain that the Amalekites, considering themselves the owners of the peninsula, resented intruders. "Our king," said one of the men captured by a youth from Simeon and brought to Joshua, "is angry that your people have invaded our lands. You gave out that you were going to Canaan, but instead of traveling on through the Ty, you are settling here and pasturing your flocks in the scant watering places."

"So you have a king," said Joshua. "And an army, too—eh?"

"We have. Agag the Punisher. And he has a right to his name," replied the man, angry at his inquisitor, angrier at himself for being goaded into speech.

"And where may this king be found?" pursued Joshua.

"And where does he keep his army? Such a riffraff of homeless cattle-thieves can't have a settlement deserving the name of a city. Eh?"

But the man refused to be tricked into further information.

"Shall I coax him with a hot sword, Joshua?" said the boy from Simeon.

"Never mind. I've an idea we'll find out soon enough."

They found out within a week. The Amalekite chief, gathering his forces from highlands and coast tracts, swept down on Rephidim, "like a hawk eager for blood," to quote Nath, "like a poison-leech, like a fly looking for sores to feed on." Aaron gave no comfort to the hundreds who ran, waving desperate hands, to the main tents. The enemy, said Aaron, was the scourge in the fist of Jahveh to punish those who had become weary in their duties to him. Moses was non-committal, but in the end he assured them, saying, "Is the Lord who brought us safely out of Egypt with us or is he not?"

That night with the enemy erecting its gaudy tents before them, Moses said to Joshua, "Are your young men as eager for action as they seem?"

Joshua's salute was formal, but the grin was spontaneous. "I'd answer for those boys in any formation."

Moses reflected.

"Drill-ground and sham battles are one thing. You're not afraid that, when it comes to a pitched fight, they'll refuse to obey orders?"

Joshua laughed. "I'm only afraid that, if the Amalekites start anything, they won't wait for orders."

"How many can you count on?"

"Three battalions, not counting the regiment from my own tribe of Ephraim."

"And what size do you judge the enemy's force?"

"Double ours; possibly more. I don't think we'll have to fear reënforcements. They've been collecting all they could on the way."

"Your judgment is keen as your eye. Pagiel's scouts tell me there are exactly seven battalions and that they are ready to attack. I've put Pagiel in charge of the defense, to guard the springs and the enclosures. I don't think I'm making a mistake in putting the offensive in your hands. You want to attack, you say. How old are your boys?"

"My men," said Joshua, "are my own age. Twenty-one years on the average. Of course there are a few youngsters, but, to counterbalance, there are just as many over twenty-five."

"No," said Moses. "I'm making no mistake. Youth's the right material for attack. Tell me your plan."

The enemy, Joshua explained, being greatly superior in numbers as well as arms, would take it for granted that the Israelites would remain on the defensive. Concentration of the tribes and Pagiel's cordon would encourage that belief. They would feast well and sleep heavily tonight. The last thing to anticipate would be an attack, and this, Joshua said, he would launch before dawn. The plan he had in mind was a double cutting of the enemy's line, concentrating upon its rear, leaving the vanguard out of the fight. He intended to advance in darkness, in two separate columns, first puncturing the enemy's line at two points and then closing in upon him, the two columns

cutting toward each other like a pair of shears. The suddenness of movement and the resulting confusion would crumple the rear, preventing the flanks from coöperating with each other. After that, everything would depend on the individuals. He did not underrate the advantage of the enemy's numbers or weapons. The battle would not be won before midday or after. But the first two hours would decide it, and in the shock of those hours the heavy armor would be of little help.

"Before dawn, then," said Moses. "When the battalions are assembled, I shall speak to them. Choose your men."

The sky gave promise of a disordered day. What was left of the moon had gone down in a surf of angry clouds. There was no sound but the clurr of a few palms rattling their sword-like leaves as Moses addressed the young army.

"This is your privilege and your test," he told them. "There is the enemy with whom there can be no compromise. It is the stone in the path of peace; it must be removed. The Amalekites are proud; they war as though they were the first of nations. They must be the first to perish. You will see to it. Advance with a high head. They have arms and allies and a record of victories. You have God. You have the majority. You have seen how he has carried you over mountains and through waters more savage than any army. Remember, when you seem to tire, you are upheld by him. As a sign of his encouragement, I shall stand on this height and stretch my hands toward heaven. I shall not let my arms fall until the enemy is fallen. Go now. Restrain your eagerness. Obey your commands. Fear nothing. Go with God."

The men bowed, lifted their crude weapons to be blessed,

and, warned to keep silence, formed ranks noiselessly. Two long lines spread in an obtuse angle advanced toward the sleeping camp. As the ends separated, darkness took them in, concealing further movement. Stillness again, except for the palm-leaves striking their dull sabers. The waiting grew tenser, stretched, and broke in two cries immediately throttled. A horn bellowed. Three others spoke in the same harsh breath. A chaos of brass struck the enormous sounding-board of sky. Battle was joined.

Joshua's columns broke through the enemy's line at both points and wheeled toward each other. But the Amalekites, once roused, disputed every foot and, in the welter of hand-to-hand fighting, it was impossible to preserve formations. The enemy was not slow to see what had happened and, since it was still too dark to attempt to bring the severed flanks together, filled in the gaps, holding the vanguard in position to repel frontal attacks. But none came from that quarter and, when the sun rose two hours later, the Amalekite line, though crumbling behind its array, presented an unbroken front to the Israelite camp. It was then that the chief, Agag, realized that no more troops would be sent against him and hesitated whether to bring the van into action to meet the invaders or launch a counter-offensive against the encamped women and unarmed men. His hesitation was fatal. When he gave orders for the left flank to swerve, allowing the unused divisions to assault, Joshua's men were uniting in the long-delayed scissors movement and cutting through the center. The camp of the Israelites was safe, but at the expense of Joshua's divisions. The circle of Amalekites closed about them. It was three hours past sunrise before

the full force of the enemy was felt. Joshua's two columns were thrown together; further advance was impossible; men fought back to back.

The elders grouped about Moses, realized that the confused turn of events meant a crisis. Moses was the first to say it.

"It is my fault," he cried. "I promised to keep my hands stretched toward heaven and not let them fall until the enemy fell. I have allowed human weariness to overcome me. They have looked to me and I have faltered; my weakening has weakened them. We must support them with greater strength." He turned to those about him. "Aaron! Hur! Hold up my hands. Don't let them drop even when they grow heavy and the blood runs out of them. Bring a rough stone and put it under me. So long as Israel is in distress, I must share it. And pray, all of you. Keep up your prayers and we will keep up their courage."

The horns of the Amalekites burst their throats as the line tightened. The Israelites answered with Ephraim's battle-cry when they saw Moses, rigid as the rock he stood on, holding the sky in his hands. At this moment, Joshua changed his plan of action. Gathering a few score from the general mêlée, he feinted toward the Amalekite left, drawing attention to that quarter; then, after the diversion had attained its object, swung sharply to the right. Zigzagging down the line, accumulating more and more of his men, he broke through, isolating the whole of the enemy's wing. The van was still too occupied to be of any assistance, and Joshua's column was free to do its work. It was four hours past noon when the first segment of the Amalekites threw down their arms and surrendered. The retreat, however, did not begin until Joshua, with his still

inferior force, occupied the enemy's van. The foretaste of victory had given the Israelites a renewal of energy, and when the Amalekite center gave way, the rout was general.

The battle split into a hundred separate conflicts. Here, about a patriarchal date-palm, a captain had rallied his men and kept off the attackers, swarming like hunting-dogs. There, a scattering of lightly armed troops tried to scramble up the rock embankments that hemmed them in, and were dragged down by their heels. Shrubbery was tossed in a storm of pursuit; bushes bore tongues of flame as swords leaped in and out of the junipers. Hacking their way toward the north, the enemy fought desperately, waiting for night to intervene and save them. But day extended its borders. "The sun," so reads an interpolation in Nath's manuscript, "as on a later occasion, stood still for Joshua."

Agag and his bodyguards succeeded in escaping. By dusk nothing was left of the Amalekites but their camp which was as empty as self-mockery. The Israelites plundered it, arming their men, decorating their women. They even gave thanks to the Amalekites, who, like most Orientals, had come to battle with all their trappings, with ewers of silver, vessels of brass and bronze, chests of cedar, fine woven stuffs, breast-plates of hammered metal and semi-precious stones.

It had been a long day, a day of slow torture. Night was a swift song. Even the wounded lifted their voices. Joshua was one of the few who slept. Moses sat by his side.

TOWARD SINAI

1

Two months at Rephidim disclosed every disadvantage. The pastures were more rock than earth; the few springs had a habit of disappearing for days, bubbling up when least expected, diving below when most needed. Worst of all, the place seemed to shrink. The circular camp, which Moses had laid out with generous gaps, became congested. Many of the Amalekite prisoners, impressed by the power of Jahveh, or (as Joshua insisted) in an effort to escape slavery, claimed relationship with the Israelites through the line of Eliphaz, son of Esau, and were admitted to the ranks. Other Sinaites, allies of the Amalekites, made overtures to the victors, expressed eagerness to join the adventure, and were absorbed by the tribes. Restrictions against intermarriage were forgotten; young men, transformed from brick-stackers to conquerors, began to look about for concubines. The multitudes were more mixed than ever, and uncomfortably crowded.

No one expressed regret when word came to leave the fields and push beyond the tawny mesas. Baggage was assembled, camels were loaded, caravans started in the

spirit of holiday—a mood that lasted less than an hour. Morning had seen them toss bright heads in the sunlight; afternoon found them cursing the sun, willing to exchange their kingdom-to-come for the benison of a shadow. The wadi narrowed, groped for an opening in the slabs of granite, tortured its way through. The river-bed was a gorge flanked by cliffs that had, it seemed, stored up heat since creation for the express purpose of shedding it now. "It was," says Nath, "like walking through a bake-oven that would never cool nor come to an end."

The way was upward. Mountains began to move, advanced, hesitated, and closed about them. The air was solid as the hills. Wilder and more menacing the journey grew; "a sea of tumbled rock, a broken earth whose only fruit was stone." The trail pushed them up, through crevices where huge blocks parodied the gates of Egypt, tilting into an impasse of bowlders. It was here that the spirits of the wanderers touched extreme depth; there seemed no way out of this dungeon except death. Then they saw the red peak of Sinai rise, burning in sunset as with internal fire. The trail flattened and spread into a road again, the road became an avenue, the avenue threw itself over the last rim and emptied them on a great plain.

They felt as if they had been dropped into a miracle. After the long approach, the hemmed-in climb when amplitude was anything more than a foot wide, it seemed that space had suddenly stretched its limitations for them. Healing was in this generous sweep, incredible with green promise. Eyes were grateful for the unbroken miles, stopped only by the distant circle of peaks. Directly ahead, the noblest cliff mounted three times upon itself before its final summit. It was Sinai, single in isolation,

confronting them with its triple mass, like three joined monoliths, like a trinity of pointed and terrible altars.

It was here that Jethro met them with Zipporah and his retainers. The Israelites hesitated, recognizing only the dress of the Midianites. But when they watched Moses embrace his father-in-law and take his wife and children to his breast, they saw a happy omen; the union symbolized peace with all that was foreign in the world. That night they rejoiced as though another victory had been won. Deep turquoise paved the sky long after sundown; a small wind brought cooling to their feet.

Jethro went into Aaron's tent, leaving Moses and Zipporah alone. It was past midnight. The boys had finally fallen asleep. But there was little speech between husband and wife. Zipporah asked few questions with her lips; Moses avoided those in her eyes. She smiled and tried to fill the gaps with homely talk. How the boys in Midian laughed at Gershom's Hebrew accent. The queer message Tana had sent from the south. What Eliezer's first sentence sounded like. The strange ways Jethro had kept in touch with all that had happened . . . But the animation was strained; this was a temporary blessing. The gods were sparing with their gifts. She would always have her two boys—she knew it instinctively. She had had Moses. She had him now. That was enough; the gods had given him to her again. But not to keep. Not for long. Hers now, though. Hers. His head was on her breast. She strained all of him to her need. Hers. There was a vision of swiftly opening skies, one unfolding after the other. She swam from height to height. Lightning played about her, plunged within her. Still she rose. All terror and all tenderness fought to be liberated. Her hands laid hold of the

lightnings; the world pressed against her bosom. She mothered it fiercely. All terror . . . all tenderness. Hers. Possessing all. Surrendering all. The last heaven opened. Hers.

2

THE three men sat beneath the black spire of a cypress, Jethro watching the complicated maneuvers on the plain, Aaron referring to his parchment, Moses facing the gashed side of the mountain. Jethro was speaking.

"No. I repeat, I would not have believed it if I hadn't seen it myself. Even now I don't know whether to trust the uncertain eyes of an aging man. A miracle, your poet Nath insists. I'll admit there are worse explanations. A miracle, after all, is a happening you can't account for—and there's no accounting for what's happened here. The scale of it! How many would you say are before us?"

Moses' mind was with his eyes, lost in the crown of rock. Aaron answered for him.

"There were over a hundred thousand in Goshen, and we picked up thousands more before we left Succoth. We seem to be attracting all Asia. And with the Sinaites and other distant cousins coming into camp—!" He shrugged.

"If you want another convert, you won't have far to look," said Jethro. "I'll admit now—Istar forgive me—that Jahveh is greater than other gods. I'm almost willing to give up atheism. To bring a disorganized rabble safely out of Egypt and keep them in control— . . . But they ought to be numbered."

"We've been thinking of that," said Aaron.

Jethro was almost as abstracted as Moses. He addressed neither though he appealed to both.

"It's too much for one man. Or two," he added quickly. "You'll wear yourselves out this way. Two men can impose orders on a race, but they can't carry them out. And when you have elected to guide such a race! It didn't need yesterday's session to remind me that yours is a peculiarly articulate people. At this rate, neither of you will last six months."

"What are we to do?" frowned Aaron.

"Abandon your present method of settling disputes or, as the priests put it, interpreting the will of God. You have enough to do without judging petty cases all day long. The people will never be grateful, not even satisfied with your labors or your judgments. You have the machinery of government to look after. Let others superintend the details. Divide the work."

"I'd like to," said Aaron, "but Moses—"

"Will find he'll have to," said Jethro placidly. "Fix your ordinances; appoint your authorities. The temperament of this multitude will be enough for you to contend with. Its private manifestations should be dealt with by judges from their own tribes. Choose able men, men above bribery, and make them rulers over certain units. For every ten families let there be a captain, an arbitrator. If an affair cannot be settled by him, there should be an appeal to a higher court, to a judge, let us say, of fifty. From these, you could extend the power to heads over a hundred families, and so on to rulers of thousands. Only in the last extremity, where the case is too difficult for these to settle, should the matter be referred to you or Moses."

"We'll have to do something of the sort," nodded Aaron. "But that won't be enough. Ever since the victory over

the Amalekites and the flattery following it, their heads have been thoroughly turned. They're taking things in their own reckless hands. Orders mean nothing to the young people, and the old ones are almost as bad. What with the spoils there's been more stealing in a month than five years in Egypt. I can't say the standards of the girls are helping any. It's an open disgrace. What we need is more laws."

"Not laws," said Moses, his eyes still on the mountain. "The Law."

"And how long," said Aaron, "do you think it will take them to learn it?"

"Years," said Moses. "Years more than they—or we—imagined. They will resist until their stubbornness is broken down; they will accept outwardly and betray secretly. We must be strong as well as patient. You and I, Aaron, will have to keep them out of the promised land until they are ready for it—possibly until this whole stiff-necked generation is gone. Acknowledging God, they have no real faith in him. They are half-grown, petulant children. We must struggle to mature them, make them suffer and suffer with them, until they are grown men. They are between heaven and hell now, having lost innocence and not having gained knowledge. They must travel further. It will be a long journey but the end will be great." He broke off suddenly. "Jethro, come with us and see this thing done."

"It is a great temptation," smiled Jethro, shaking his head, "but with my age and my retainers, I would only impede you."

"On the contrary," said Moses, "you would quicken us. You know all the roads. Your coming would be a token of

alliance throughout the peninsula. Your wisdom in advising us to appoint judges is another reason. Come and continue to enlighten us."

"I am much too honored to notice the flattery expected by fathers-in-law," said Jethro. "But you do not need my enlightening. A candle is useful, I admit, but not when both sun and moon are shining. As for the roads and pastures, I will send you one who knows them far better than I. My son Hobab—you saw the boy on one of his visits home—knows every oasis between Horeb and Palestine and his sense of approaching danger is uncanny. I'll send him to you as soon as I reach Midian. And Zipporah—?" His pause put the question delicately. Moses' silence answered it. Jethro nodded.

"I thought as much. But I felt you should see her and the children before you went on." He paused, remembering a tree in Midian.

"First I thought it was the danger," said Moses. "The Amalekites will not be the last tribe to oppose us, nor the strongest. There will be defeats as well as victories. But it isn't these that determine me. The truth is—hard though it sounds—I must keep all of myself. I cannot share my life. It is dedicated to one purpose, not to one person. If I am to succeed, I must save all energy for that. I can give nothing to love, not even to fatherhood. Now, for the first time, I understand the demand upon Abraham: he had to be willing to give up what he cherished most for something still dearer. I know what the sacrifice means. But I must make it. I have chosen. No, that's a false sentence. My purpose dominates, my mission compels me. There is no choice."

Jethro nodded again. "I will keep Zipporah until you

send word. The boys, too, are better off in Midian, at least for the time. It's the right place now; it's home to them. When they're old enough to join you, you won't recognize your sons. Gershom is already talking about leading an army—the boy fights with every one in the neighborhood. But little Eliezer is his mother's child. The way he has with goats and lambs proves he's a born farmer."

The diversion succeeded in bridging the gap between Moses' preoccupation and Aaron's concern.

"But these laws," Jethro resumed, as though they had been talking of nothing else, "will require much study and more pondering. Has either of you more definite commandments than the restrictions which do not seem to be troubling your people overmuch?"

Aaron caught at the question. "There are at least fifty regulations that ought to be carried out."

"I've been thinking of one or two," said Moses.

"Why don't you compare and draw up a code between you?"

"I haven't been able to condense my thoughts sufficiently," replied Moses. "Too many laws are as bad as no law. It's no good to add confusion to disorder. We must clarify our own demands before we impose them on others. Here I am in the thick of it; pulled by ways and means, affected by accidents I know are meaningless, but cannot rise above. Yesterday, when I went through the camp, I overheard Abiram say, 'Look at the man who has been called the meek one going through the multitude to get applause.' And this morning, when I skirted the edge of the encampment, I heard another say, 'Our redeemer must be planning some new hardship for us; he is afraid to come through the camp and look us in the face.' . . .

I must rise above the personal sense. I must be alone for a while."

"An excellent idea," said Jethro. "But where would you go?"

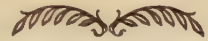
"Up there," said Moses, pointing to the peak. "Height has always had a fascination for me, and there is something in particular about that summit—I cannot put it into words. But I feel that, up there, above this confused plain, I would attain perspective. I am always lifting my eyes to hills; help seems to come from them. It will take days, a week or two perhaps, for the illumined moment, but I feel it will come. It was on such a mountain that I first knew myself, and God. Something stronger than memory tells me, if revelation lies anywhere, it lies in some such aloofness."

"It sounds plausible," said Jethro. "Every man must find his own altitude somewhere. And, as you say, things take on new values from a mountain-top. By all means, go. After the crowding of the last two years, it will do you good to be alone for a while. Take provisions. Those rocks will not supply you with much. Aaron will look after the camp till you return; I won't be able to stay away from Midian a week longer. It might be better if you'd see us off first."

Moses hesitated. "It will be hard to tell Zipporah."

"I think she knows," said Jethro. "I think she knew before we left home. As for the boys, they will be well looked after. You mustn't worry."

"No," said Moses. "I can't fear anything. I don't dare to. I have only one way. If there's any other, I've forgotten it."



THE SUMMIT

The people had sanctified themselves, had prayed aloud to Jahveh and offered up sundry private oblations to older and more obscure gods. But they were not at ease. Moses was leaving them for the first time, no one could say for how long. Nor could any one say why. One talebearer had it that Moses had quarreled with Aaron and was going into voluntary exile. The women were certain that relations between Miriam and Zipporah were at the bottom of it and that Moses was only doing what every man would do under the circumstances. A more persistent rumor spread that Moses was ascending Sinai to commune with his mysterious God who spoke in words of fire and syllables of thunder. The mountain itself began to take on deific and forbidding outlines. Men swore they heard rumblings in its bowels; children who had scrambled confidently over its knees were forbidden to approach it. It might be the hill of God, but the legends that grew about it were fearful and unholy.

It was the morning of departure. A glistening wind polished the slope until the rocks were root-white. Two trumpets, at opposite corners, blew rings of fine copper.

The people came to the mountain, though no man would go nearer than the border of coarse grass. Only Aaron, his sons, Nadab and Abihu, and a few of the elders advanced further than the invisible boundary. The multitude saw Moses make the sign of benediction, saw him ascend into a sky that was like a sapphire laid open.

It was no easy jaunt. Unburdened though he was, for Moses had resolved to fast until illumination entered him, there was contest for every step. The air took on weight, pushing against him. Vine-snares ran out from nowhere, tripping his feet. The sun laid hot hands upon his shoulders. He straightened them and went on. No flocks went with him now, not even a bird. But he was not alone.

He continued reasoning with himself.

"Are they less worthy than the Hittites, the Phoenicians, the Chaldeans?"

"Not less worthy, but more rebellious."

"Am I not, also, a rebel? Am I, therefore, less zealous? If I can keep a promise to myself, can they not keep a covenant?"

"They are not like others. They are a peculiar race."

"For that reason they are a peculiar treasure. They can be a light, not only to themselves. A beacon. A burning bush. A pillar of fire."

What way there was, stopped. Now it was wall and crevice, fissure so smooth that no grass could find roothold. Moses was forced back, found another opening, a gallery piercing the first hump, arranged in rugged and uneven steps. These served him another two hundred feet. He looked down. The plain was a grizzled map, splotched and creased; the towering cypress beside his tent was a round blot, black as sediment of ink. Nothing to look back for. Up. Up. He pushed on. Sometimes he crawled

over time-cracked slabs, kneeing his way up; sometimes he took the wiry hands of shrubs and let them pull him over.

At noon, he discovered a thin waterfall and drank of it, listening to its clear nonsense. Two hours later, he watched a small cloud and an eagle mock each other.

"Eternal circling," said Moses. "Is there no altitude where it must cease? Water twisting over the earth. Air winding about the sky. Stars weaving among each other. Space curving to some orbit never to be seen. And all these threaded through the mind of man that contains all and can hold nothing. Order out of chaos. Order everywhere except in his disordered heart."

One more peak. He began the last climb at dusk, working through the sea of granite that was like nothing so much as petrified waves. Night came on as he stood beside the cleft which was the final reach of stone. The summit.

The summit. Stars were close here. The great red planet overhead, the cold blue one pointing the horizon, called him further. They did not hang idly, but burned under the same mandate as the sun. "The law that binds these stars," thought Moses, "that brings Arcturus and the first green blade out, each in his season, is kept in splendor and authority. I must tap that source. The law—"

But he was too tired. It had been a steep ascent. "The law," he murmured, and fell asleep.

. . . . . .

The mountains, says Nath, *fought with Jahveh for the honor of housing Moses on his pilgrimage. Each claimed to be the only one worthy to receive the visit of Jahveh and his emissary on earth.*

"I," said the mountain Tabor, "am above them all. I am the cushion on which Jahveh rests his elbow when he falls

asleep; I have caught the tails of comets in my ravines. I am so tall that when all the mountains of earth lay drowned in the flood, the waters did not even reach my ankle. I am the proper stature. Let me bear the prophet."

"I," said the mountain Ararat, "may not be as high as Tabor, but I am holier. It was on me that the ark rested after water had poured one hundred and fifty days from the windows of heaven. I took to my bosom what was left of the human race; I gave them seed for harvest and grapes for a vineyard. Therefore, since I saved his ancestors, let me bear the prophet."

"I," said the height called Migdol, "saved Moses himself and all the multitudes that are with him. Was it not I who hid him in my folds so skillfully that the Egyptians could not find him? When he wished to cross through the sea, was it not I who crouched down and let his people walk over me so that not even their shoes were wet? As I bore them once without complaint, let me bear the prophet again."

"I," said Carmel, "am royal. Kings have made their sanctuaries upon me, temples have been laid at my feet. The other mountains are barren, but I am always blossoming. In spring I go in sprout-green, while the little hills about me skip like lambs. In summer I am crowned and girdled in majesty. Even in winter, I do not put off my color, but crown myself, sitting in stiff and purple clothes. I, alone, can give Jahveh his rightful setting. Let me bear the prophet."

But Jahveh said, "No. The glory of Jahveh will not rest upon proud mountains, nor on hills that dispute because of their eminence. Rather will I choose a lowly mount for one who is meek. I will choose one that has not vaunted or justified itself, even as my chosen servant is

silent when others belittle him." So Jahveh gave the word to his angels and Sinai, the most insignificant mountain of earth, was lifted up until it overtopped the others. And it was on Sinai that Jahveh spoke to Moses.

When the world heard the Divine Voice that had not sounded on earth since Abraham, it gave up its dead in a prolonged convulsion. Out of every grave, the souls hurried to Sinai, and from the womb of heaven unborn seers and prophets came to hear revelation. Clouds, blacker than trench-beetles, surrounded the mountain which was miraculously enlarged to accommodate Jahveh and his four hundred thousand angels. As Sinai rose, the heavens descended and, when the two met, a wall of lightnings stood between them and the rest of creation.

The mouth of a cloud opened and shut like a door as Moses walked through. But, although the light was more blinding than the sun reflecting itself, it was not due to the presence of Jahveh. It was only the angel Hadarniel and his cohorts, whose bodies are a screen between Jahveh and his universe, a living curtain interposed to preserve men from being shriveled by the direct gaze. When Hadarniel spoke, his words played about the sky in letters of flame; the bodies of his daemons, having absorbed so much of the dazzled atmosphere, were solid light.

Then was heard the voice that tore the elements apart, that entangled water, air and earth before the First Day. But though the mountains pitched like small boats and the air was shaken out like a tent-flap, it was not Jahveh. It was only Kemuel, the porter of the firmament, and his genii of destruction. When Kemuel smiled, two bands of thunder bracketed his mouth; when he laughed, eagles fell from their eyries. He let down a rainbow and Moses crossed upon it.

Here was Sandalphon with his seraphs, gathering the prayers of men and binding them into garlands for the Lord. Sandalphon never knows where Jahveh may be laboring, but he breathes upon each garland which, crying "Holy, holy holy!", rises through space by its own longing until it rests on the brow of the Almighty.

Then Moses felt such heat as first held the fluid universe in a womb of fire. It was not Jahveh but the river Rigyon which follows the Lord and curls about his feet. It is the burning stream of purification in which the angels baptize themselves daily before entering the presence of Jahveh. The river is generated in front of the Throne and is continually renewed by the awe of the holy Hayyot whose perspiration falls in drops of liquid fire. No mortal but one could set foot on those steaming waves.

So when Moses had crossed Rigyon, as had been foretold, and beheld Gallizur whose name is sometimes Raziel, he knew he was near the Source. For it is Gallizur who is the spirit of Order. He arrests the ecstasy of the Hayyot which would otherwise consume the world. He restrains the stars that long to rush back to the divine bosom. He controls the seasons that would empty all their treasures in one lavish hour. He makes a cycle of life and death so that neither has an end and each flows into the other.

Finally there was a blast of diamond-flashing light and Moses beheld the Throne. It was a double dais. On the right sat Jahveh, an infinite transparence, a multitudinous Being whose every facet was promise. On the left sat the Law, exquisitely perfect, clothed in the virgin garments of Truth. And, while the angels held a new day like a canopy above them, Jahveh gave the Law to Moses.

. . . . . .

It was the end of his vigil, an end of gathering clouds. The physical man remained on his rock; another self moved freely in an atmosphere more rarified than air on mountaintops. Sense was lost in spirit. Moses no longer saw the stars crowding above him nor the Israelites spread out below. Nothing was visible except his thoughts and these moved in luminous, almost palpable, shapes.

"You have been enslaved," said one of these ideas, "by a sense of time, by the false magic of the tongue, by the lust of the eye. There must be no more idols, neither of flesh nor of stone."

"No more idols," echoed a companion thought, "and no more theft. Do the stars steal from each other to increase their glory? Does one day rob the next one of light? What did you want with the gold of the Egyptians? What led you to their possessions?"

"Covetousness," cried a shape gray as sorrow. "How can God enter when he is shut out by greed? What do you crave beyond his prodigal gifts? Is there not abundance and to spare? Must women dishonor their fathers, must men bear false witness and kill to possess what is thrown away as soon as won?"

"Uncertain hearts, uncertain hands," answered another thought. "Therefore they labor and know not when to rest. Therefore they work hardest to preserve what crumbles first, to capture in many shapes what never can be given form."

"Glory in the least and Order in the highest," sang a new radiance. "There is no other god. The chart of the sun's path or a leaf's progress is drawn by the same hand."

The sky was black now, but Moses saw only layer upon

layer of light. The uncovered universe bared its secrets until all space and energy were one. Everything fitted into perfect place. Balance revealed itself everywhere. Pattern within intricate pattern, and nothing interfered with the myriad interwoven cycles. The field was strewn with stars no less than the sky; the structure of an insect was as precise as the shape of a planet; the rainbows crumbled in a sunset and were repeated in a feather. Symmetry was the essence of God; Order his first command. He was obeyed even in the heart of turbulence. The tides might threaten to overwhelm the land, but they were drawn back with a calm relentlessness. Winter might bury the earth, but earth survived. Nothing encroached beyond its season. Nothing broke through the plan which evolved it. Nothing disturbed endless unfolding of endless designs. The elements did not conspire against each other, but penetrated space with harmony . . .

Harmony. Balance and counterbalance. Rhythm, matched to a just measure. Paradox of fulfillment: form moving against and blending with form. Life pitted against death, death regenerating life. Harmony in the least. Benign and imperishable Order. Discipline guiding the stars, holding the worlds in an atom. Over and under, entering everywhere, contradicting nothing, resolving opposition into one expanding whole. Union of law and lawlessness. Unity. Infinite Form, protective and precise. The Law.

Illumination beat upon Moses now, though heaven was black. There were no more questions, only answers widening his sky.

"I have it," cried Moses. "I must bring it to them before it escapes."

Flat chippings of slate were all about him. He picked

up one, thin and square as a tablet. Finding a pointed stone, he began to scratch the surface. Automatically, the letters shaped themselves, covering both sides. But the testimony was not complete. The vision was beginning to fade. Hurriedly another slab was incised and covered with square characters.

He began to descend. The voice stayed with him, calling from rock to rock; the flashes increased, showing him new channels through gulfs of stone. Moses descended, wrapped in his vision, oblivious to thunder and lightning.

. . . . . .

It was the storm that undid the Israelites. Day after nervous day had passed, and still no word of Moses. Not a sign of his return, not a flare to show he was still there, not even a torch to say he had reached the top. "The wild animals of the desert followed him," said some. "Sinai is pitted with bear-caves," said others. "One scorpion in his path would be enough," said the followers of Korah.

But no one would believe what he said. It was the unspoken terror that troubled them most. It was the mountain. Each day it grew more sinister, more monstrous in its inflamed bulk, more evil in its silence. "Even the birds would avoid it now," said the people; "they are too wise to trust themselves to its shadow." They knew Moses had not been devoured by beasts, for nothing could live, they told each other, in the Mountain of Death. They waited fearfully for the outcome.

It came in thick clouds, gashed with lightning. Oven-black thunder poured from every hole in the mountain. The crannies belched and the smoke (according to Nath) was as the smoke of a furnace. The earth shook and the people abandoned hope.

"Moses has offended the gods of the mountain," they

cried in panic. "The spirits of Sinai have seized his nameless God and have slain Moses for his impious words. We are all dead men."

Korah and Abiram gave them hope. "We are not lost yet. There is still a way. Let us disavow Moses and his offense, and placate the gods of the peninsula. Let us sacrifice to the forces of evil that control this world. Let us pay homage to Milcom and Chemosh and Dagon, and we will be spared."

Eager to propitiate the destructive powers at any cost, they tore off ear-rings and amulets, and rushed to Aaron.

"Here," they cried. "Make us a god that we can see. Moses is dead and his God has perished with him. Be our leader. Give us a god that will be before us, near at hand; one we can understand."

Aaron tried to argue with them, but they were beyond persuasion. They urged, "If you will not help us, you are against us. We will find a leader elsewhere—and we know where to look."

Aaron perceived the hand of Korah, though the man himself was not visible. Would Moses never come? Must he humor this frightened mob? If Moses failed to return, could he—?

"You are children," he temporized. "How can I make a god?"

"With this—" "And this—" "And these." Ear-rings, bracelets, amulets, spoils of the Amalekites, Egyptian silver, metal of every kind was pressed upon him. "And here is Thamri. He helped with the bronze bull at Memphis. Let him make a smaller one for us, and let him plate it with gold."

"But Moses—?" persisted Aaron, weakening.

"Will you hold us off until death takes us?" they shouted. "Prepare an altar; sanctify the ground; make proclamation. Erect the god from our sacrifice and let us worship as we did before this man Moses came among us. We go to find wood. Thamri will smelt the gold. Be ready when we return."

. . . . . .

As Moses reached the half-way plateau, the storm ended; its last echo was the waterfall with its bolt of silver. Night had gone. Ghosts of dawn wavered along the ridge; below was hollow darkness. Suddenly, the plain was agitated with blowing sparks. Torches, thought Moses, and listened for the drums of attack. A sound reached him, but it was not the voice of mastery nor the crying of the overcome. All he could hear were torn strands of a song. His gaze traced a circular movement in the confusion of lights. He hurried down.

Still at one with his vision, his eyes refused to accept the scene. The details were definite, but they could not be focused in a unit that had any meaning. The rings of celebrants, the lewd words, the blasphemous altar with its glittering reminder of Amen, the conjurations to Dagon and Chemosh . . . Were these his people? What nightmare had transformed them into half-naked savages falling on one another in their perverted orgy?

The scene converged to a pin-point, in which he saw nothing but the image of a golden calf. It expanded a hundredfold, multiplied itself, and danced about Moses in mad spirals. Moses was no longer aware of his body. He swept through the mob to its center, mounted the three sacrilegious steps, and dashed the tablets against the idol. The slabs broke and Moses turned on the people, shouting,

"There lies your salvation! You have chosen. You cannot serve God and Amen!"

The circles broke, overthrew each other. Moses added to the maelstrom by calling, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come to me!"

Joshua's men and the tribe of Levi were the first to rally. Swords and protests slashed simultaneously. Aaron, signaling his sons to overthrow the metal calf, shouted above the din, "Praise Jahveh, you've come. And in time! Give orders now. Let us exterminate the trouble-makers. We must inspire fear. Let no man discriminate even for his brother. Neighbor must be against neighbor until this rebellious seed is rooted out."

The fury was beginning to leave Moses. "No," he said, "I did not bring them out of Egypt to kill them here in the mountains. Stop them, Joshua, before they murder each other."

A few of the elders, edging through the mêlée, reached Moses with supplications. He brushed off their hands; the blaze had died, but the smolder persisted.

"No. I want neither excuse nor explanation. Not tonight. The Lord knows you are a fickle race, a turncoat people, and it is only his mercy that keeps him from deserting you. Would to God *I* could! But I cannot. Go. I will talk with you tomorrow. But not until that abomination is destroyed. No man need present himself until the wooden core of that foul thing is burnt, the metal stripped off and reduced to powder. Don't pollute the soil by burying the smallest grain of it here. Take the dust far from the camp and let the winds carry it where it belongs. Scatter it—toward Egypt."

He turned an uncompromising back upon them.

COMMANDMENTS

THREE weeks had silenced the camp, but apprehension had increased. Men looked back over their shoulders. Moses' days were a succession of appeals.

"Sheep could never have followed you more faithfully," said Aaron, as the two of them sat on the little hill where the idol had been throned. "You have them in your hands now. They'll do anything you say. Give them the law, or a set of laws, and such an accident as last month's won't happen again. I'll see to it," he added decisively, "the more so since I failed to stop them. Still," he went on in self-extenuation, "I've always said it is the spirit of reverence we must encourage. Does it matter what name they call him as long as they worship one god?"

"I think it does," answered Moses. "Chaldea has its own god; so has Philistia. Ours is not like theirs, a choice of warring powers, the selection of one god among many. Our god is God. There is no other."

"Why not tell them that?"

"Because words won't say it. We have no language flexible enough. You can't use the terms of trade and gossip to project infinities—and even if I could find another

speech, they wouldn't understand me. And a new tongue?"

"Try the old one. Words are not our masters; they are slaves. Tame them. Twist their necks, if you must, but make them obey you. Whip them into order—into orders. And the people, obeying them, will be keeping your commandments."

"Not mine," said Moses. "God's. I cannot even frame them."

"Don't think of it as a set of formulas. Say it as though you were talking to me, and I'll make notes. Repeat what you were saying before about one god."

"Not one god, Aaron. God. He who brought us out of Egypt and the house of bondage."

"Perfect. A magnificent preamble. But it must be made direct and more sonorous; a communication out of Jahveh's own mouth. Let Jahveh speak: I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Go on."

"We must make it plain that there can be no others."

"Good. But let it all come as though Jahveh were saying it. The people fear words only when tradition or deity repeats them. Making it plain is not enough. It must be a command. This way: Thou shalt have no other gods before me! That has authority. What next?"

Moses felt for a phrase, lost it, and shook his head.

"It's no use, Aaron. Reduced to a clause, it sounds harsh and meager. Up there, I found union of thought and substance. Nothing was isolated. I saw the thing in its relation to everything. Not a set of strictures, but an integrated, all-encompassing law. It was a sort of vision. But it either gets dense when I try to shape it or it eludes me entirely. Some of it was going as I came down the

mountain; the golden calf drove the rest of it out of my head."

"Possibly this will recall the summit," said Aaron, producing two stone tablets. "I've had them pieced together. They seem to contain notes of some kind."

Moses studied the slabs for a time, growing more absorbed while Aaron took care not to jar the abstraction. Suddenly Moses lifted his head.

"Yes. That was it. To destroy idols is not enough. We must have no more statues or paintings of any objects."

"But," protested Aaron, "that would be the death of art."

"Let it die, then," said Moses. "Let it die as long as men worship appearance rather than essence, form and not the spirit, the pattern instead of the Creator who designed it. Earth is rich in living beauty. Must our wonder be imprisoned in stone before we can recognize it? Must we always have a golden calf before us? As for our emotions, the highest feelings cannot be cast in a mold. Pigment and marble never can embody thoughts which have nothing to do with the world of materials. It is only the gods of the heathen who can be represented in line and color. Have we left Egypt only to carry her folly with us? If you insist on command, let it be: Thou shalt not make any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or in earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them."

"That's eloquent enough, but it lacks power. There should be a threat against those who disobey. The law must have teeth. Something weighty, something more like: For I, Jahveh, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of

the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

"You can't end like that," said Moses. "Is God only an anger, returning hate for hate? Add: And showing mercy unto thousands of generations that love me and keep my commandments."

Aaron hesitated.

"Isn't that making it rather lengthy? But go on. Any more about Jahveh?"

"Yes," replied Moses. "The use of the name. It's being bandied about with too much familiarity. False oaths are supported with 'As Jahveh lives' and 'In the Name of the Lord.' If they cannot use the divine syllables with respect in ordinary intercourse, we must suppress them. We must stamp out the boast that is a blasphemy."

"How would you suppress it?"

"Simply. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold the hypocrite and blasphemer guiltless. . . . Or a similar construction."

Aaron waited, but instead of more illumination, the light began to fade. After an empty interval, Moses raised cloudy eyes.

"I can't make it out. I see something here about 'rhythms of labor' and 'season of rest,' but the mood that evoked the phrase is gone. Without the mood, the words refuse to come to life—the letter alone is a dead letter."

"What you read sounds something like the Sumerian 'day of rest for the heart'—the ancient Sa-bat."

"That was it. The Sabbath. But not in the civic sense. It is the Lord's Day. The legend has it that he, who rests in action, ceased creating on the seventh day and the earth rested with him. The allegory may be difficult but the fact

is simple: Nature finds a breathing-space everywhere. Rest after labor is not only wise, it is holy. Time for meditation, self-searching, recapitulation. Thanks for work accomplished and for leisure won. We must remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

Aaron looked applause. "That last sentence is a commandment in itself. It only needs a little amplifying."

"Shall we add," said Moses, "this sentence: 'Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh is a day of rest and preparation'?"

"Not quite. It isn't enough to tell the people what to do: they want to be told what *not* to do. It's only by limiting their freedom that they'll begin to feel free. They are lost without guide-posts and restrictions—and the more prohibitive the rules are, the happier they'll be. You've stated the positive aspect of the Sabbath, now for the negative: In it thou shalt not do any work. Neither thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor the stranger who is within thy gates. . . . I think that includes everything."

"Honoring God and his Sabbath are the impersonal ways. We must know God in his reflections; we must recognize the heavenly Father in our own. If our days are to be long in the land which the Lord has given, we must honor father and mother—the inner circle that encloses God in the family."

"Perfect. I wouldn't dare a syllable in addition. But what about the other negations?"

"They are basic, not particular. Israel has no monopoly of them."

"And the first?" inquired Aaron.

"Thou shalt not kill."

Aaron frowned. "We'll have to qualify that. There'll have to be a clause about the right of retaliation. There always will be burning for burning and wound to pay for a wound. It can be acknowledged in a supplementary sentence: an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, life for life."

Moses shook a determined head. "No, Aaron. That's a survival of Babylon; we have no reason to preserve the code of Hammurabi. Let the injunctions stand without comment. They have force enough."

"And they are?"

"Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

"Those admonitions might not be equally popular, Moses, but a state might be governed on the last three alone. In three short sentences you have framed the tenets of chastity, domestic relations, property rights, perjury and all that might come under the head of good citizenship. You have developed a genius for condensation. If the mountaintop is responsible for such concentrated power, we ought to move the twelve tribes up there. The last three makes a splendid climax."

"One more. One that sums up the spirit of all. Thou shalt not covet. If they follow this teaching, they will not kill or steal or commit adultery or testify falsely. The other commands forbid the body; this one goes to the source, to the mind. For covetousness is not in the flesh any more than contentment. And it is against greed, against envy that we must fight. Disdaining the good we have and lusting after what we have not, is worse than

stupidity; it is the highest blasphemy. For it discredits God."

"I'm afraid I don't put so high a value on metaphysics, Moses. I'm more concerned with the physical man. Heights and a rarefied atmosphere are all very well for the inspired. But if we want to talk to people on their level, we'll have to come down to earth. Let's continue on that plane."

"I think there's nothing more to say."

Aaron examined his notes. "But these are only a few generalities. What you've suggested wouldn't make more than ten commandments."

"Ten are enough. They constitute the Law."

"What can you mean, Moses? The Law? There will have to be hundreds of laws, strictures, definitions. These few principles will, I grant, make an excellent base for the real legislation. But, left in the present form and unaccompanied, they are much too loose. The people will be as bewildered by these generalities as if they had none. We must amplify your foundation."

"And what would you suggest?" asked Moses with no expression in voice or eyes.

"Specific rules. Plenty of them. For every occasion. Rewards and penalties. Laws for daily use, laws for feasts, for religious ceremonies, for health, for public morals, for strangers and emergencies, for all the situations your ten injunctions imply but do not meet squarely. Your words are a testimony in need of explanation."

Moses watched a lizard freeze itself to escape detection, then, conscious of scrutiny, vanish like a wriggle of sand. He did not look up as he asked: "Have you thought much of this particular need?"

"Of others like it." Aaron referred to his scroll. "As I remarked when Jethro was here, I've noted some thirty or forty of the most necessary. For instance, there's so much carelessness in camp. Fires are being started and left untended. They must be stamped out. If they are allowed to spread, the one who kindled the fire should be held responsible for any damage. There should be a law about it. The same is true of unprotected wells and pits. If a man leaves them uncovered he must make good the loss of any domestic animal that may fall in. There should be severe penalties against trespass. We must see to it. If an injury happens to a married woman, her husband, being her owner, should be indemnified. A man who wrongs a woman must either marry her or endow her. Stealing a man and selling him as a slave should be punishable with death. The first of the firstfruits should be brought to the priests. There should be a tabernacle erected wherever we go; attendance must be compulsory. There should be regulations about contagious diseases; the rites of purification ought to be stricter. Adultery must be defined; sodomy should forfeit the beast's life as well as the man's. If cattle are stolen and are found with the thief, he should restore double. If an ox gores a person to death, the ox should be stoned and his flesh not eaten. But if the ox has been known to push with his horn for some time and his owner has allowed him to run loose, then the owner as well as the ox should be put to death." Aaron took up a new roll. "If a man deliver a sheep or an ass or any cattle to his neighbor—"

Moses got to his feet so suddenly that Aaron looked for the signal of alarm. But the face above him showed nothing more violent than impatience.

"I'm sorry, Aaron. It isn't your fault. When your words rise and fall in such lengthy measures, I hear nothing but the drone of priests in the temples of Thebes. It is a tone of voice I can't listen to. Don't resent my lack of patience. Go on with your notes, but make them in writing. Then I won't lose all sense of them as I've been doing."

He rose, taking a deep breath.

"Meanwhile, I'll talk to Bezaleel. I doubt if his plan for the Tabernacle can be improved, but the measurements must be changed. Don't put too much emphasis on ritual. We want to make Israel a holy nation, but not necessarily a kingdom of priests. Oh, don't take it as a personal reflection. Aaron—!"

NATH LUXURIATES

JAHVEH was not only a jealous but a demanding god. Through his spokesman Aaron, he specified twelve materials for building the tabernacle, one for each tribe; he described with oriental detail the gifts he expected. "For twelve weeks," according to Nath, "the multitudes devoted every hour, pausing not for slumber, to show their gratitude. The people had received the priceless Law and could not rest until they had erected a sanctuary fit for her shining."

Public quarrels and private conspiracies were forgotten in communal activities. The old women were delegated to weave fabrics of goat's hair for the outer covering of the great tent. Mothers of more than three children were entrusted with the making of fine-twined linen; young wives embroidered it with gold and scarlet threads. Old men tanned hides, cut straps of leather, dyed badgers' skins blue and rams' skins a royal red. Captains of the tribes procured jewels from Arab traders; onyx and half-precious stones were found in the rocks. Boys and girls were sent to gather calamus and storax, cassia-buds and cinnamon, olives and the shellfish onycha for oil and incense.

Older children brought in clear-grained shittim wood, boughs of white acacia, sometimes the trunk of an uprooted tree. Young men broke up the veined quartz, crushed it in stone mills, washed it in slanting tables until the earthy stuff flowed away and the particles of metal remained. Bezaleel, who had been a jeweler in Egypt, taught them how to form ingots of gold and bars of silver by putting crucibles full of metal grains into a furnace and, when the molten mass bubbled, pouring the thick stream into molds of clay mixed with sand. He showed them how to carve and chase, how to draw wire, to solder and inlay the finer scrollwork, set stones in prongs that held them like hawks' talons. He also instructed them in the cutting and engraving of gems, using a small bronze file, a thin saw and pointed emery powder. It was Bezaleel also who, combining the apothecary's art with the jeweler's, compounded the anointing oil of five hundred shekels of flowing myrrh, the same amount of cassia, with half the quantity of calamus and sweet cinnamon, to which one hin of olive oil was added.

Nath is responsible for most of these facts. In his description of the tabernacle he outdoes himself. He luxuriates in details as though he had designed them. With unflagging pleasure and increasing energy, he examines every inch and shadow; he lavishes impartial enthusiasm on the architecture and the fringes of the priests' robes. Nath's original manuscript devotes an entire papyrus to the Urim and Thummim and the strange oracles delivered by these lights and perfections. But the eighth division of "The Radiance of the Shekinah," that unknown precursor of the Talmud, is unusually concise, and the following excerpts are taken from that scroll:

Bezaleel was well chosen for bringing beauty into waste places; his name declared him "in the shadow of God" and he was of the noble line of Hur. As Hur had upheld the arm of Moses in conflict, Bezaleel strengthened it in peace. Loveliness ascended from all he touched; when he sat abstracted at table, the bread-crumbs he rolled formed into figures more lifelike than most of the living. Magic aided his craft. He knew the combination of letters by which God had parted water from earth; he could draw pentacles that rose in shapes of smoke; he could summon djinns and demons to waft loads that oxen could not budge.

Bezaleel's first task was to make the Ark, for, he said, it was an ark that saved Noah and, through him, all who walk the world; it was an ark that held Moses when the Nile tried to pull him under; and it is an ark in which the Law should be housed and protected.

The Ark consisted of three caskets, symbolizing the three patriarchs, the three peaks of Sinai, the three deliverers, Moses, Aaron and Miriam, the triple bounty, omnipotence and mercy of Jahveh. The outer casket, ten spans long, was of acacia wood studded with bronze, a gilded rim running about it, engraved with the thirteen attributes of God. It was carried by two carved staves, passing through four brass rings, seamless as time. Within the outer casket was a silver one which enclosed a jewel-box eight spans long. This was of pure red gold and contained the two tablets of stone, the transcribed laws, the Ineffable Name and all God's other epithets. By a special dispensation, Bezaleel was permitted to violate the second commandment and Jahveh made a hole in the heavens so that Bezaleel might see the angels at prayer. With these

as models, he took virgin metal and sculptured two cherubim to match the two tables and the two highest names of God, Adonai and Elohim. A light, not of earth, continually shone from the faces of the cherubim which were turned slightly back, like a scholar bidding his master farewell. Their eyes were set upward so that the sparks which issued from them did not injure the multitudes but kept off any vultures and evil spirits which threatened. The wings were fixed in adoration, but on holidays they fanned the air with such perfume that nations beyond the furthest sea exclaimed: "Who is this that comes out of the desert like the bride of a prince with fragrant pillars of fire, with myrrh and frankincense and all the powders of the east?"

The Table was scarcely less remarkable. It was of ordinary shittim wood, but its properties were such that, whenever the tribes moved, it moved of itself; it withered the hand of any blasphemer that rested on it; it laid its own cover; and, unlike the shewbread of Babylonia which rotted as soon as baked, the food in its dishes grew sweeter with age.

The Candlestick was Bezaleel's triumph. It was of green gold like no design that had ever been. Jahveh revealed the shape to him by showing the original plan for the separation of the seven days of the week. So from the central shaft, like the Tree of Life, spread seven branches, each one opening into a flaming point. The cups for the candles were in the form of silver almond-blossoms, and so perfect was the representation that, as the season advanced, the candlestick flowered and bore silver fruit.

The Altar, of acacia, overlaid with brass, held a fire that burned continually. Wind and rain could never ex-

tinguish it; the fury of the sandstorm could not beat down its upward-reaching hands. When the spirit of the wood learned for what purpose Bezaleel intended it, its fibers cried to Jahveh, saying, "The heat will work between the thin plates of brass and consume me before the first sacrifice is completed. How, then, am I to keep the flame forever burning?" Jahveh replied, "What are the fragments that they should question the Design? Am I not the Law which makes peace between the elements? Do not the dead come before me and leave me with greater life than they ever knew? Peace to your fears. The fire will not eat through the brass, though it be no thicker than the skin of milk."

The Court of the Tabernacle was hung with decorated linen one hundred cubits long on all sides supported by twenty pillars of cedar. Each was ornamented with sockets of bronze and fillets of silver; hangings of blue and scarlet needlework ran from column to column. The wood for these pillars was obtained in no ordinary way, for cedar is not to be found in the wilderness. It was Jacob whose forethought supplied it. Journeying from Haran to Egypt he saw into the future and planted a cedar-grove, saying, "Some day my children's children will be released from bondage and God will require a sanctuary so they can give praise for their deliverance. They will need strong timber. Therefore, I will plant cedars on the edge of the desert for them." So stout had the trunks grown that no ax could pierce the rind; knives snapped when struck against the iron twigs. Bezaleel pronounced the ancient prophecy, made the sign of the first seed, and the trees lifted their roots and followed him to camp.

Ten Curtains of the closest woven linen, showing cheru-

bim sailing among the stars, made blue and scarlet panels instead of walls. Fifty loops and fifty tassels of gold cord coupled the hangings and flanked the sideboards fitted into silver sockets. Eleven huge curtains of goat's hair, dyed in as many colors, formed the tent, and over all these was a great covering, finer than fog but tougher than the sinews of a mountain. Jahveh had created the animal Tahash especially for this purpose. Its one skin was sufficient for the entire enclosure and as soon as the Tabernacle was completed, its species disappeared.

Nath proceeds in undiminished vigor to measure the Mercy Seat, to determine the height of the Gate, to consider the Screen for the door of the tent, to appraise the texture of the veil which divided the Holy from the Most Holy Place. Leaving weights and measures for the moment, he passes to a résumé of the sacrifices. With as much gusto as though he were disclosing the beauties of Paradise, he tells the precise method of killing the sacrificial bullock, what parts of the altar were anointed with its blood, where the flesh and skin were to be burnt, in what manner the fat and the two kidneys and the caul above the liver were to be deposited. One after the other, he recounts the different requirements of the sin offering, the wave offering, the daily burnt offering, the heave offering, the trespass offering, the peace offering, the meat and drink offering, the votive offering, the expiatory offering on the Day of Atonement, the thanksgiving offering at festivals, the free-will offering accompanied with extra baskets of meal, the offering of firstfruits for the priests, the sacrifices where sweet herbs and unguents graced the altar instead of blood. We learn that breast of ram was a dainty reserved for Aaron, the thigh "heaved" for his

sons, while the lesser priests had to content themselves with unburnt portions of the shoulder, cakes of oiled bread, an ephah of flour and a quarter hin of wine. We see the fine line drawn between the profane and sacramental beast; we are shown the very door at which Aaron and his clergy eat the consecrated food. Nath does not omit a single wafer.

Consideration of Aaron brings him back to imagery as he leaves the ceremonial for the esthetic side of priesthood. Nath evidently repudiates the crude fact that certain rareties not indigenous to the peninsula were obtained by barter, for he says, "The stones for the high-priest's breastplate were a gift direct from God. Pearls and precious gems had fallen with the manna and the nobles had gathered these, offering them when the Tabernacle rose of its own accord like a pyramid of clouds."

Nath's words are a fine needlework, stitching every thread in the ephod, placing onyx brooches on both shoulders, binding the robe with woven stuff about the neck, embroidering the rich garment with pomegranates of scarlet, and hanging bells of gold between the bright fruit, so that "the sound of Aaron might be heard when he went in and out before the Lord." But quotation is an injustice to Nath; transcription may condense but it scarcely improves his flavor. The high-priest's breastplate should be left entirely to him.

Bezaleel's masterpiece was the breastplate, the pattern of which had been revealed in a vision as he slept in the sanctuary. Its base was a blend of all the metals on earth and one that will never be known until the Final Day, for Jahveh had dropped it in a white rain and only Bezaleel knew how to distill its substance. Gold chains of wreathen

work were fastened to its corners and held it so that the most distant worshiper could see its least filament.

It was divided into three rows set with twelve square stones, differing not only in color, but in quality, matching the tribes they represented.

The first stone was Reuben's, the red sard that rouses anger and desire, for its men are fierce and its women passionate. The sard also has the power, when grated and mixed with wine, of promoting fecundity, and it was the old wives of Reuben who first found the mandrake root.

The second stone was Simeon's, the green chrysolite, the stone which cracks when touched by an unchaste woman, for it was Simeon who had guarded virtue with his life.

The third stone was Levi's, the carbuncle, which emits orange beams even as the faces of that tribe beam with piety. The carbuncle imparts wisdom to its wearers, and the Levites were those who did not join in the dance about the Golden Calf.

The fourth stone was Judah's, the pale beryl which insures victory in battle. It was an appropriate stone for a tribe in whose loins sleep a dynasty of Kings; and a fitting color, for Judah's face was a sick and greenish yellow when he confessed to his sin with Tamar.

The fifth stone was Issachar's, the gold-streaked, heaven-colored lapis lazuli. Insuring piety, it was the proper choice, since this tribe devoted itself to the Law, which is sapphire-clear in depth, shot through with the gold of everlastingness.

The sixth stone was Zebulun's, the white pearl which, like the merchant-sailors of this tribe, drew its sustenance from the sea. It was formed on the Second Day when

Jahveh's word plowed the firmament and sowed the deep waters with seeds of light. The tribe of Zebulun, moreover, are lovers of maxims, and the pearl is round as time, rare as truth, potent as tears, white as a high thought.

The seventh stone was Dan's, the topaz, which is neither precious nor common and deceives the buyer, even as the inconstancy of the Danites deceive their neighbors. The topaz has a golden cast; but it is not the color of true gold. Rather is it the film-color which gathers because of base alloys. So does Dan shine with a false glitter, being a mixture of noble and unworthy metal.

The eighth stone was Naphtali's, the turquoise, for it endows its owner with speed and cunning, and Naphtali was "a hind let loose." It was appropriate that the swift runners should carry talismans of this stone, for when their fathers dug it from the mines of Maghara they recognized the sky-blue of the turquoise as the color of wind.

The ninth stone was Gad's, the crystal which was made by the unified currents of upper and lower air. It is the stone of vision, and the mind of its wearer becomes clear as atmosphere, radiant as moonrise, penetrating as light. The crystal, created before the first day so that God could work in the dark, knows the earth's beginning and can tell its end.

The tenth stone was Asher's, the green felspar, which is the fused verdure of earth. It was Asher's emblem, for he was promised the fat of the land and its emerald was veined like the full leaf and the open flower. Olive hills and sap-running streams could be seen beneath the surface; its three digits contained a countryside.

The eleventh stone was Joseph's, the amethyst, which

makes the wearer irresistible. The women of this tribe were a torment to themselves as well as to men; for the amethyst, sanctified by the virtuous Joseph, kept its wearers chaste even while it enhanced their beauty. Its color increased the onlooker's admiration, for it shed, like Joseph, royal light.

The twelfth stone was Benjamin's, the amber which does not yield its secret. Like Benjamin when he refused to betray his brother's misdeeds, it seems dull and opaque. It is the only jewel which exhales an odor: it diffuses the smell of gardens under the sea where it is found. Its origin was a mystery to all except Bezaleel who, testing it in all elements, saw it contained a portion of each: the sun gave it light, the storm cloudiness, earth the power to attract, fire the means to emit sparks when rubbed, ocean the charm to ward off disaster at sea. A modest jewel, its quiet demeanor emphasized the brilliance of the others.

All these stones of memorial were decorated with the names of the tribes. But no tool designed by man cut the letters which burned in blackest night. The engraving had been done by Bezaleel who summoned the smallest animal created, the Shamir, which is half the size of a barleycorn. It makes its home in the heart of an unborn diamond and feeds on rock. Its teeth are so sharp that Bezaleel had to bind its jaws with necromancy or they would have devoured the twelve stones in as many seconds. Only after the Shamir had performed the task for which it had been created, did he allow it to burrow through the earth until it reached the blazing center where diamonds are generated.

Joshua's record contains none of these details. He evidently regarded the building of the Tabernacle as a

necessary but tedious affair. His soldiers were obliged to help; the Sinaites continued friendly; daily drill was temporarily abandoned. These were prosy times for Joshua; the weeks to which Nath devoted his most eloquent books are summed up in a casual paragraph.

"Last day of Tishri. No military activities for past two months. Camp occupied in building. Numbering of the people begins next week. Soldiers not at work on the tabernacle are to be employed as census-takers. Moses has delivered the Ten Words and Aaron has given out one hundred by-laws. Says there are more to follow. Aaron wants me to enter the priesthood; claims it is a steadier occupation than soldiery. Moses tells me to wait. Food plentiful but monotonous. People asking about Canaan."

THE ARK MOVES

1

THE fourteenth day of Abib was a day of silver trumpets in the wilderness of Sinai. The spotless lamb had been killed in the prescribed manner without breaking a bone; the unleavened bread stood in new bowls; the emblems of unity were prepared; the basin, the consecrated knives, the sprig of hyssop waited for evening. Staff in hand, men congratulated each other. Their first year of freedom, the second Passover and the completion of the Tabernacle after six months, were to be celebrated on the same day. Six months, they repeated Nath's remark, symbolizing the six days of creation. And now it was finished; now, like the Lord, they could rest. They had made an ark for Jahveh; he would appreciate it. Moses would not require them to remain in the shadow of his grim mountain much longer. If Jahveh wanted to give them more laws or if Moses wished to commune with him, the mountain was superfluous. They had their god close; they could carry him about wherever they went. A wise man, Bezaleel. They would see the house he had made for Jahveh tonight. Eagerness capered in the air like a young bat. The trumpets called them at last.

It was a vehement assembly. Color and sound tried to outscream each other; booths were bright with holiday. The Feast of Osiris had never been more brilliant than this ritual of song and sacrifice, food and pantomime. It was only toward the end that distrust returned. To make their sacrifice more effective, Aaron's eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, had mixed certain powders in their braziers to give off green flames. But when they lit the strange fire at the altar, there was a loud discharge, and the blaze burst from its containers, catching at their girdles. Linen offered no resistance, and before water could be dashed from the laver, the ephods were sheets of flame which the priests could not tear off. The day of rejoicing ended with death.

Moses saw he could keep the people at Sinai no longer. They feared every inch of the ground. Even the Tabernacle was not safe, they said, when evil fire runs down from the hill and snatches the priests at holy work. They spoke of their homeland as though Moses were willfully keeping them out of it. They had received the Law; they knew their lesson; school should be dismissed. When, a week later, the signal came to move the camp toward Canaan, the multitudes were so eager that the tents in the south quarter, contrary to command, moved before those in the east. They hurried on, like school-children freed from class, who dread that the teacher might call them back.

The Tabernacle was taken apart, the hangings folded in prepared chests, the ark carried by the strongest of the Levites and the twelve tribes, lifting their standards, moved in the appointed order.

The gold lion of Judah and the gray hind of Naphtali were the first insignias to be planted in the new bivouac at Paran, thirty miles north-east of Sinai. It was cheerful

ground with no threat of unholy hills. A morning breeze brought the gulf nearer; the borders of Palestine were not far off. But within a month, the complaints began again. The heat and the slow progress were too much for them; they grew irritated at trifles; unused to ordinary comforts, they demanded luxuries. The past was forgotten in idealized longings for it; Egypt became an Eden from which an angry god had driven them. Korah and his satellites spurred on the disgruntled ones; they no longer lowered their voices when Moses passed.

"Do you remember," said Shaphat of Simeon, "the good days when the Pharaoh declared a holiday, and there'd be jugglers in the square and scattering of cakes and illuminations on the river at night?"

"Yes," went on Gaddi, son of Susi. "And the time when the Nubians brought their tribute. The jolly feeling of crowds. And the booths crammed with strange things. And parades with dwarfs and blue monkeys and sometimes an elephant. The sight was a holiday in itself. To think of those streets and to look at these miles—!" He swept a disgusted hand over the empty landscape.

"And the smells!" added Gemalli with a reminiscent sniff. "Ointments and wine and temple-incense and rich malt and musky women all blending into one intoxicating smell. Not like this foul sand reek! And, instead of dull sounds of praying, the fine excitement of town. The hum a city makes: cries of porters and fruit-sellers, the happy rush of trade—civilized noises we'll never hear again!"

"And the food!" continued Shaphat whose face was like damp clay. "Different from this diet of bread and manna that dries up the soul. Do you remember the fish that we

ate, and the cucumbers that grew so freely, and the sweet melons, and the young leeks?"

"And the garlic and the onions and the fleshpots," said Gemalli with appropriate sounds. "Oh, why did we ever leave Egypt?"

"That's what we'd all like to know. Why?"

Talk in other quarters was no more comforting. Nor was it subdued. Moses would not let Aaron placate him.

"They want me to hear," he said, "and I listen. I don't know whether to let them ruin themselves or abandon all but a few of them. Or should we drive them over to the gulf and give them fish till they stink with it? No. Let me think it over alone."

He paced under a sky dull as sackcloth, hurling his impatience at it. But his own anger was all that returned.

"Why? Why? Why? I can call for answers as well as they. Why, O Lord, am I afflicted with this leadership? Why am I responsible? Have I conceived this people? Have I begotten them that I must carry their frets in my bosom as a nursing mother carries a crying child?"

No answer assuaged him, but the questioning was its own measure of relief.

"Where am I to find flesh to satisfy this multitude? Must I slaughter the flocks that give milk to the children? Can I carve it from my bones? Let me die, O Lord. Kill me out of hand. I am too wretched to go on. I am not able to bear this people any longer; it is too heavy for me."

And from the expression of despair, he drew strength. Wretchedness, being unable to go further, turned back upon itself. "We cannot make meat out of tears," he said, and returned to camp.

2

Nath makes much of the answer to the cry for flesh, and the blessing that was a punishment. Joshua, whose men suffered heavily, is more circumstantial. From the two accounts, we have certain features in common. Both agree that there was an unprecedented flight of quail, that the people were gluttonous, that many of them fell ill and not a few died. But Nath's conclusions are suspiciously catastrophic. "The quail," he says, "fell in such quantities that they piled two cubits above the ground, so that the people did not have to stoop to pick them up. They ate of them for a month, but only the pious could taste the flesh without injury; all those who had complained against Moses were diseased. Flesh became loathsome to them; it came out at their nostrils; their bowels revolted against them. And thousands were smitten with a running plague. A wind that swung the world off its hinges carried the curse away. And they called the place Kibroth-hattaavah, which is to say 'The Graves of the Lustful.'"

But it is Joshua and not Nath to whom we owe a fragment of conversation that shows Moses' return to affirmation. Coming in the midst of his log of encampments, its very unlikeness to Joshua's other entries is significant.

"Camp preparing to advance. Hazeroth the next objective. About four days' journey, according to Hobab. Two of the elders, Medad and Eldad, claim they have visions and are beginning to prophesy. Threatened them, but they continued. Warned Moses. He refused to interfere, saying, 'Don't be envious for my sake. I am not the only instrument through which the Lord speaks. Would to God that all the people were prophets! And you want

to stop two of them!' Aaron looked sideways at Moses, muttered 'Heresy!' and walked out of the tent."

3

Sickness followed them to Hazeroth. The sudden illness of Miriam delayed them here—for a week it was thought she had leprosy—and when the hills of Kadesh were reached the camp was not yet cleansed of its fevers.

Korah gathered his group at the edge of the wilderness. When they had ascended the height, he pointed north.

"There," he said, "it lies. That is the southern shore of the Dead Sea. You can have your kingdom if you want it. It has taken us fifteen months to reach. And still we stand here. Summer has begun; it will grow fiercer in this outpost of hell where nothing flourishes but disease. It is for you to say. But you must choose: On to Canaan or back to Egypt. One way or the other; we must not remain here. And if Moses will not lead you out of Paran, there are others who will."

His followers argued. Eagerness and timidity fought with each other. Fear won.

"Canaan may be an evil land," said some. "Or a well-guarded one," said others. "Or its rivers may be poisoned. Or Joshua's men may not be ready to march against the walled cities of Palestine."

The conference grew more excited. Fingers knitted unpatterned beards; heads threatened to leave their shoulders in denial; hands churned the thick air. As was inevitable, compromise triumphed.

"You shall lead us, Korah," said the most enthusiastic.

"After we have had an accounting," added the more cautious.

"You want to wait still longer?" asked Korah incredulously.

"Only until the spies return," they answered.

Their uncertainty reached its nadir when they approached Moses, requesting him to send scouts, half hoping he would refuse. But Joshua had already received instructions to choose twelve men, one from each tribe, men with smooth tongues and bird's eyes.

"Search out the land," said Moses, "and bring back a full report. Take along provisions for twenty days. If you remain longer, you will have to forage for the rest. Divide yourselves into three groups. You, Shammua as the oldest, will enter Rehob by way of Zin. You, Palti, will take charge of three men and go up toward Hebron. And you, Joshua, will go with Caleb and Igal whichever road seems best. Remember, you are all to listen and say little. You are not to enter discussions of any kind, even when provoked. Your whole duty is to judge the lay of the land, estimate the inhabitants, whether they are strong or weak, scattered or concentrated, what proportion dwell in cities, what in tents. Try to enter the strongholds and, if that's impossible, chart them. It is important to note conditions for pasture, whether there is wooded land, and so on. If you can bring back any evidence, so much the better. Go now, and God go with you."

Shammua's group was the first to return; Palti's followed a few days later. But, anxious though the people were, Moses forbade any reports until Joshua and Caleb could make theirs also. A month fidgeted by. On the

fortieth day, Joshua's trio returned, Joshua bringing a bundle of figs and pomegranates, while Caleb and Igal carried grapes so heavily clustered that they had to bear them on a staff slung over their shoulders. The people were loud in thanksgiving. Moses and the elders heard the reports the same hour.

"It is a good land," said Joshua, "and well stocked."

"A good land?" Caleb interrupted. "That's like Joshua. And to say it's well-stocked is worse than understatement, it's libel. Canaan is the nearest we'll ever come to Paradise; it's a land overflowing with milk and honey. Look at these fruits!"

"But how about the difficulties?" challenged Shammua. "You were there long enough to see how hard it would be to enter those walled cities. What's more, it's my opinion we'd need a force twice as great as ours to hold them, and one—with all respect to Joshua—five times as experienced. The Canaanites, in my estimation, are as well-trained as the Egyptians."

"And a hundred times more powerful," warned Palti, Nath's nephew, who inherited his uncle's love of hyperbole. "They're giants, I tell you. Gaddi himself saw one of them over seven feet high, a son of the man-eating Anakim, if ever there was one. The walls of their towns reach beyond the clouds; their ceilings are the floors of heaven. I, myself, didn't see any. But a man I got friendly with told me the country is full of them—giants so tall that, in their sight, we would look like grasshoppers. He said that they use trees for toothpicks and that, once upon a time, five Canaanites, entering a queer-smelling cave at evening, were suddenly lifted a hundred feet in the air. Then they discovered that what they thought was a cave was a half-

eaten cheese which one of the giants had lost and found. He told me that these sons of Anak were the seed of the fallen angels who had mated with the daughters of men and that they were only half mortal. How can we hope to conquer them?"

"My report," continued Shammua dryly, "does not include giants, but ordinary enemies quite as powerful. Our arch-foes, the Amalekites, are massed in the south; the mountain-passes are full of Hittites and their allies, the Amorites, are in the northern hills. The Canaanites themselves are strung out along the sea, the greatest number being on the coast of Jordan."

"What of it?" said Joshua. "Have we been training for more than a year to run away at the first whisper of opposition? We've beaten the Amalekites once; we can beat them again. Have we come four hundred miles from Egypt to turn back now?"

"That is for others to decide," answered Shammua. "My business is to give facts, not opinions. We may differ in details, but at least six of us agree that Canaan will be no easy conquest. On the contrary, every inch of ground will be disputed. We will be considered robbers, and no mercy is shown to invaders. Our best blood will be sacrificed on their altars; our women and children will be their prey."

The air was torn with wails and imprecations. Joshua and Caleb attempted to still the mob, but the mob railed against them as loudly as against Moses. "You are tools—or worse," the people cried. "Liars!" shouted Palti. "Traitors! Traitors!" threatened the women. Korah and his group were busy among the malcontents. Twice Moses

raised his arms for silence; twice he was swept aside. Fear and anger blazed about him.

"No more words," shouted Abiram, one of Korah's henchmen. "We've had enough of them. No more promises. Give us deeds. Do something!"

Moses started to reply, but the crowd, in a panic of cross-purposes, would not attend; accusation was the one speech in common.

"Why did you bring us to this place? Will it satisfy you only when we fall by the sword and our children are enslaved by the enemy? Would to Jahveh we had died in Egypt! If God were merciful he would let us perish in the wilderness."

Another faction was less resigned, readier with a plan. "Wouldn't it be better if we chose a captain and return the way we came?"

Moses could no longer be silenced. His voice was a harsh gong among a buzzing of midges.

"Go back by all means," it rang. "Cowards can always find company. Choose yourselves a leader that loves you better than I. I have borne with you long enough."

There was a stir on the outskirts of the crowd. A stone curved through the air, missing its mark. Two others followed, one of them grazing Moses' ear. Joshua plunged through, and caught a Reubenite. Almost wrenching arm from socket, he swung his man into the circle.

"You won't have to wait to find death in Canaan!" He threw the stone-thrower to his knees. "Any others? Come on. There are plenty of stones—and a sword for each man that stoops to one." He broke off. "Oh, you fools! Haven't you learned anything? Don't you see what Moses has done for you? Have you forgotten the plagues and Bialim's

horsemen? Where are his chariots now? And the Amalekites? I tell you, they are bread for us. If they come out against us in one way, they'll retreat in seven. I tell you, you have nothing to fear except yourselves. If Moses gave the word, we could assault heaven, even if we had to storm the place with ladders!"

But though the stones stopped, the tide of anger continued to rise. Moses' voice rose with it.

"Let them alone, Joshua; they are their own enemies. In turning against me, they turn against God. They curse themselves. Their carcases shall lie in the desert and be meat for the fowls of the air. They shall grope blindly in full daylight. The earth they plow shall yield no more than iron; when they pray for rain, the heavens shall be brass and send down only a yellow dust. They shall choose a wife and others shall lie with her; they shall build houses and others shall live in them; plant vineyards and not gather the grapes. They shall forswear their God, and God shall bring them into new lands and slaveries undreamed of. In kingdoms that no man has known, they shall worship merciless idols; they shall throw themselves before machines that feed on them. Wherever they go they shall find Egypt; and there they shall try to sell themselves for bondmen—and no one shall buy them. They shall carry armfuls of seed into the meadows and the harvest shall not be finger-high. Olive trees shall grow along their coast, but they shall never anoint themselves with oil; their branches shall broaden with leaves, but the locusts shall consume them. Races yet to be born shall come out against them; countries shall welcome them only to take their substance and cast them out naked. They shall lie unburied in waste lands and no dog shall howl over their bones. Worse still,

they shall not die. They shall be kept alive to suffer with scabs and itches, with the botch of Egypt, with sickness of bowel and brain; the Lord shall make their plagues wonderful. In the morning they shall long for evening, and in the night-time they shall cry, 'Would to God it were day!' The tender women whose feet are too delicate to touch the ground shall bear children whose blood leaps in fury and whose hearts harden against those who bore them. Long shall be their wanderings and uneasy their periods of rest. Peace shall run at their approach and every man's hand be raised against them. They shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations. And the Lord shall drive them."

The vehemence burned through them, bit at their fears. Even the least superstitious gave more power to Moses' damnations than Joshua's appeal.

"Unsay it," they cried. "Lift the curse. We will obey you, never question you again. Only take away the curse. Intercede with Jahveh so that he will not disinherit us. Let us go up against Canaan."

The tide had spent its last wave; the mind of Moses stood up, clear of the receding jetsam.

"I unsay the curse. And God will forgive iniquity—that is why he is God. But Canaan? You are not ready for it. Not this generation. Your children shall possess it, the children you feared would be its prey. They will be hardened in the wilderness until no trace remains of their fathers' cowardice. Joshua may win your battles but fear is the enemy that overcomes you. The children must be free of it. Fearless, they will come into their inheritance. They are the hope—and the fulfillment. We must endure for them. Otherwise—"

His hand swept the wastes. Silence flowed after him. A dropped sword splintered the air as though flung against a sky of glass. The only motion was a retreating cloak molded and remolded by the wind. Moses turned before the door of his tent. The multitude raised their right arms in a gesture of reverence. But he did not see them. His eyes were on the earth. He stood there, regarding a stone.

BOOK FIVE

"Whom the Lord knew face to face"

MUTINY

1

Nath's last work, "The Book of the Wars of the Lord," is his least alluring. It betrays the author's old age, for it is repetitious, disorderly, even misleading. Most of it is a confusion of names. Thus, for example, Nath refers to an encampment at Hagidgad and, in a subsequent paragraph, to the same spot as Gudgodah. Again, he speaks of Aaron's death at Mosera six months before the occupation of Jotbath, which is scarcely reconcilable with another passage describing Aaron's death on Mount Hor, several years and at least four encampments after the departure from Jotbath. Again, we have a lengthy recapitulation of the laws with exhortations to obey them proceeding from the mouth of Moses. But the summary, intermingled with doubtful antiquarian notes, not only repeats the earlier legislation, but, at certain points, contradicts it and is frequently anachronistic.

In spite of Nath's obscurity, we finally realize that the solidarity of the tribes was a legend. Instead of a unified progress, there were dozens of tentative advances and separate repulsions. We see, through a haze of un-

certainties, the guerilla warfare along the gulf of Aquaba, the long expedition of Simeon and Gad in Suph which ended in their control of the mines, the armed opposition of the Edomites concluding, after ten years, with a truce between the distant kinsfolk.

Toward the end, buried in the negotiations with Balaam and Balak, there is a taste of the wild flavor that is distinctly Nath. But it is not sustained. The imagination fades. At eighty-five, Nath was losing control of his manuscript. Younger and less decorative hands were scratching over it.

2

The tufts of white on Aaron's brow, more like feathers than hair, completed the resemblance to a bird of prey. Age had sharpened the scimitar beak, had narrowed the eyes. Leaning over the map, Aaron seemed a white-headed vulture about to swoop. Joshua, too, had changed. But where Aaron had been edged, Joshua had grown rounder with the years. The legs had thickened, the chest broadened in a way that reminded Moses of Horemheb. If time had added dignity to Joshua's shoulders, it had taken some of the arrogance out of his hair. No longer a mop of flame, it was so cropped that one could scarcely detect the rust in his grizzled beard. Age had affected Moses least, showing itself only in the hands where arteries knotted their blue cords. Standing shoulder to shoulder with Aaron, he seemed far more solid; he was the substance, Aaron a distorted shadow. His arms were muscled with a force greater than the body's; power rested in the small valley between his eyes. Sixty years had heightened

the forehead, but the jaw had been sculptured by something unrelated to time.

"You worried us, Joshua," said Aaron. "The more so since you left with half the force."

Joshua laughed. "And you, Moses?"

"I was never in doubt about your return. I'd expect sunrise to fail before you did. Still, I hope the victories are not making you rash?"

"Victories?" inquired Joshua. "Skirmishes. I'd be ashamed if I couldn't guarantee more after twenty years' preparation."

"It seems forty," said Aaron.

"Call it forty," conceded Joshua. "It's the favorite figure ever since Noah. Don't you remember the ark floating forty days? And how they've stretched Moses' stay on Sinai to the same number? And the legends about our serving Egypt four hundred years? Whenever there's a doubt among us, forty and its multiples appear, and every one knows they mean nothing but indefiniteness. Forty is no longer a numeral, it's an idiom."

Aaron's attention remained on the map. "I don't seem to find Haradah."

"You won't," said Joshua. "It moves about with its chief, Arad. I soon found out, when we tracked it down, Haradah was not a place but a condition. And now it's not even that."

"With half the force?" asked Moses.

"We had twice too many. You and Aaron underrate the men. Mind you, I'm not criticizing. I agree with you that Kadesh has been the best possible headquarters for these twenty years. And I agree that it was wise to get

the tribes used to separate encampments. But the testing-time is past. The way the Reubenites took the wadi at Rimmon-parez proved that. And I don't want to seem boastful, but my own tribe of Ephraim had things all its own way at Hashmonah."

"It's youth," said Aaron. "You move fast. Moses and I are old men."

"Nonsense," replied Joshua. "I'm all of forty-one. I tell you, you underrate the spirit of the men just as you overrate their youth. Young fellows are right enough for a surprise attack, but for a campaign of any size, you need veterans. We've got them. Here we are. Where's your campaign?"

Aaron temporized. "Haven't we had Tahath and Libnah and Shaphar?"

"Preliminaries. They seemed hard at the time, but they were only kernels for an infant army to try its teeth on. It's full-grown now. It's beginning to need grown man's food."

"It won't have long to wait," said Moses. "These have been difficult years for everybody. We've had to live through reaction, weeding out the poor stuff, getting rid of the slave temper."

"I think," growled Aaron, "we've got rid of humility a little too quickly. There's been a lot of large talk in the absence of the soldiers. That's one reason why I'm glad you're back, Joshua."

Joshua laughed. "I'll stake my hope of Canaan it's Korah. It's a mystery to me how the man can live in the atmosphere he creates. Feeds on his own poison, I suppose. I wish you'd give me a free hand with his crowd. They're the one plague you brought with you, Moses."

"You can't take arms against a bad smell, can you?" said Aaron.

"I look at Korah in another way," said Moses. "I see him as a goad. He's not a pleasure but a necessity. He's helped toughen us. If it hadn't been for the persecutions of Bialim, we might still be yoked in Egypt. If it weren't for Korah—" His voice hardened. "We need every malign agent. I don't grudge a single hardship. I wouldn't have one stumbling-block removed. I'm grateful for every drouth, for every snake—and Korah. We have learned to live on malice, to drink bitter water without complaining."

"Have we?" said Aaron. "My priests—"

"You pamper them," cut in Moses. "I've told you before we'd have trouble if they continued acting as though they were a tribe apart. Your Levites have become as arrogant as the priests of Amen—and twice as greedy."

"But," argued Aaron, "you can't come down hard on them now. They've had enough trouble getting their enactments carried out."

"Can't I? They won't be the only ones to feel it, either. There's going to be a new spirit in this camp, not twelve or two hundred aspirations. There's going to be one command from now on. And Korah will be the first to know it. . . . Joshua, bring me that map."

3

The bald head of Korah was emphasized by a thicket of hairs which sprouted from his ears. His eyes were sun-inflamed, his chin grotesquely elongated. The expression of his mouth was not improved by the absence of four teeth.

"I will tell you another story," he said to the ring about him. "I knew a widow with two daughters to take care of. The woman had nothing but a small field which yielded scarcely enough for the three of them. One day, when she went to sow rye and barley, a Levite stopped her, saying, 'Don't you know it is forbidden to sow mixed seeds?' So the woman had to content herself with half the grain. The family, living on scraps and refuse, looked forward to the harvest. But when she gathered it in, another Levite appeared, saying, 'Do not forget that the firstfruits belong to the priests.' Giving his portion to the prayer-saying vulture, she started to thresh what grain was left, whereupon another Levite appeared, saying, 'Have you forgotten the heave offering, the first tithe to the high-priest, and the second tithe to me?' So the poor woman, without enough grain to bake a quarter-loaf of bread, looked at her starved children and determined to sell her field. No one would buy it, but finally she traded it for six ewes, hoping she might have the full benefit of the wool as well as the younglings of the sheep."

Korah hesitated, allowing the pause to heighten the suspense. "You have foreseen the poor woman's mistake. Once more she felt the long arm of Moses. When the firstling of the sheep was born, a Levite demanded it, for, so reads the law, 'the first-born belongs to the priest.' When shearing-time came, another Levite compelled her to yield a portion of the first of the fleece. Not satisfied with this, he reappeared when the sheep were grown and the flock numbered eleven, claiming one sheep out of every ten as his tithe. Once more, the law upheld the psalm-singing thief."

Watching the faces, Korah saw there was no need to prolong his parable. He let them have the climax.

"But worse was to follow. The poor creature, not knowing how else to feed her family, slaughtered the sheep, hoping to have full possession of the meat. Aaron himself then appeared, saying, 'According to the law, I demand the shoulders, the maws and the cheeks of the animals.' 'In the name of the Lord,' cried the exasperated woman, 'is there no way I can keep my property out of your hands? Let the meat be consecrated to the sanctuary.' 'Good!' cried Aaron. 'Everything consecrated belongs to me.' One of the daughters died of hunger, the other gave herself to a Moabite. The woman was found in the desert, half-clothed, sowing pebbles in the sand. Such are the blessings of Moses and Aaron," he concluded with bitter homage. "Such are their 'divine decrees.' "

"Blessings?" sneered his henchman, Dathan, taking up his cue. "Haven't we had to endure their cursing? Haven't we paid double for every miracle?"

"We've made too much of these—miracles," said Abiram promptly. "We've been fooled by their tricks and our own stupidity. What was so wonderful about crossing the Red Sea? Anybody who studied the tides could have done it. And discovering springs in the desert is easy for one who has been in this part of the world before. Any herdsman in Midian can locate water with a bent twig. Miracles of that sort may impress slaves; they can't delude free men."

"Who may *they* be?" inquired Korah with rhetorical scorn. "Surely not us. You'd scarcely call twenty years of

tabernacle-building, homeless wandering, and never-ending warfare, freedom."

The seeds of fire had been well planted. Small flames burst in a dozen places simultaneously.

"It's slavery," cried Nemuel, an uneasy-shouldered fellow with a jaw pushed out against the world. "Worse than any we've had. Egypt was a garden-plot compared to this. I've said it before and I'll say it again. It's slavery—"

"Yes," interrupted Abiram. "And in Egypt we were under the whip of a foreigner, an enemy. What could we do? But Aaron is one of our own people—and Moses is supposed to be our savior!"

"And who is this man Moses?" asked Korah. "A savior? A tyrant, an adventurer, using us to satisfy his own ambitions. Didn't he try to assume leadership in Egypt just as he has done here? Didn't I see through him from the first? I tell you, there isn't anything he won't do, nobody he won't sacrifice for his sense of power."

"Who is he, anyway?" squealed a man with a face like a weasel. "Isn't he half Egyptian at that? No wonder he finds it easy to oppress us. It's his natural inheritance."

"Every one knows who his mother was," supplied Dathan. "Who was his father? That's a commoner mystery."

Snickers rewarded Dathan. Gossip followed him. "I've heard it rumored," said the weasel-faced man, "that his father was Set, the god of the desert. That's why he brought us here. And here he's going to kill us off, for every soul dying in the desert is a sacrifice to the Evil One."

"Well," said Korah, grasping the moment, "we'll cheat him. We're not going to die here—are we?"

"No," shouted two hundred voices.

"No," echoed Korah. "We're going to live. And live well. Can you guess where?"

The expected answer was shot back to him like a thrown ball.

"Canaan!"

"Canaan," repeated Korah. "If we have to break necks and every law to get there."

4

The sacrifice served as excuse for the outbreak. The Reubenites, led by Dathan and Abiram, refused to appear. Whispers of sedition threw the already excited congregation into turbulence. At the height of the disorder, Korah and his two hundred stalwarts interrupted the service, Korah committing the final affront by wearing an exact replica of the high priest's robes. Korah did not wait for questions.

"You know without asking what it means," he said, walking up to the tabernacle. "You are both guilty. You, Aaron, of tyrannizing over the people under color of saving their souls. You, Moses, for taking too much upon yourself and giving the priesthood to Aaron, instead of having the office decided by a vote of the people."

"And the people have chosen?" inquired Moses, addressing them rather than Korah.

The people were never less able to choose. They looked at Korah, relishing his attack upon their governors. They looked at Moses, fearing the punishment his wrath might call down. They looked at the ground.

Korah, counting on their response to harangues, took up the challenge.

"I voice their grievances," he said. "Here, before the tabernacle of Jahveh, I accuse Aaron of robbery, using so-called divine commands as a mask. I accuse him of claiming holiness for himself and his favorites, whereas every member of the congregation is holy as he. I accuse Moses of using his leadership to betray the people with vain promises. I accuse him of self-glory and arrogance in claiming that Jahveh reveals his laws only through him." Korah's voice climbed. "I accuse him of the worst betrayal. I accuse him of trying to separate us from Jahveh by refusing to let us serve God in our own way and by putting false interpretations between the Lord and his people."

Korah had shamed them out of their timidity; they rallied to his boldness, stamping feet in approval.

"And your masquerade," said Moses, ignoring their shifting favor, "is, I presume, also an accusation?"

"It is a statement," said Korah. "It declares that the time has come for a change of officers, and that, if you do not accept the new order, we will go on without you."

"And without the ark?" inquired Aaron.

"We have the sanction of Jahveh," said Korah; "we do not need his relics. Do you think that God is going to stop taking care of us because you do? It is not Moses and Aaron that keep us in his good graces, but our forefathers, the patriarchs who received his promise. Do you suppose that Jahveh will desert a whole nation for two men, no matter how high they rank themselves? No, God is not deceived. Nor are we. We are our own masters. God, not Aaron, delivered us out of the hands of Egypt.

God can also deliver us from the tyranny of Moses. The time has come."

"It has," said Moses. "And so has yours. There cannot be two leaders. Nor two opinions. Come," he cried to the people. "Choose now—and abide by your choice. All who are for Korah and the liberty he promises, take up your arms. Those who believe in me will stand against them."

The multitude divided like waves separating from each other, shouted their slogans, beat drums, stampeded. Korah's followers were the first to make an organized offensive, beating their way toward the north. Moses and Joshua, gathering the Ephraimites, headed them off six miles beyond the camp. Joshua's men, fewer in numbers, but used to the field, received the full charge of the rebels.

"Break through them," cried Korah, "and Canaan is yours."

Unaccustomed to civil war, the trained troops allowed some three hundred to escape. Moses suddenly took command.

"We have been merciful too long," he told them. "From this day on we must use force to the uttermost. No more half-hearted measures. Begin now. Make an example of them."

It was the end. Joshua gave the order to drive Korah and his remaining two hundred and fifty at a sharp tangent toward a deep fissure. The mutinous crowd gave slowly, trying to stem the retreat, but disaster was inevitable. Foot by foot they were pushed toward the pit. There they fought blindly, insanely, and Joshua's men looked to Moses. He shook his head.

"No compromise," he ordered. "Let the earth have them."

The pit was choked with their bodies. "*The earth opened her mouth,*" says Nath, "*and swallowed them up and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah and all their goods. Even their linen in the wash-tubs and the pins they had mislaid rolled toward the brink and disappeared. The very names of the rebellious ones vanished from the documents on which they were written.*"

Ten weeks later, thirty derelicts entered the camp before dawn. Their right forearms had been severed, the flesh seared at the elbow. They were recognized as part of the Korahites who had broken through, were brought before Moses and questioned. But they could not answer, since their tongues had been slit. Only their eyes spoke.

Except to threaten children, no one mentioned Canaan for a year.

RISE AND FALL OF OG

1

The next year was uninterrupted campaigning. Using the enemy as a constant threat, Moses gave the tribes no leisure for internal dissensions. Realizing there was only one way of maintaining power, he left the enforcement of law to Aaron's Levites and took the field. "Legislation may serve to establish leadership," he said, "but the word means nothing until it becomes an act. A successful dictator stops commanding on papyrus and dictates victories on the battlefield."

Under the combined generalship of Moses and Joshua, they advanced toward the country east of the Jordan. Permission to pass through Edom was refused by Prince Bela, about to ascend the throne as King Balaam, who did not choose to begin his reign with an influx of armed emigrants. Joshua was all for forcing a way, but Moses dissuaded him. "Let us bring down antelopes before we go lion-hunting."

Accordingly, they veered southward, made an abrupt angle at the Gulf of Aquaba, and, bearing north again, skirted Edom to the southeastern border of Moab. There

were encounters at Zalmonah and Punon, in which the Israelites were easy victors. They advanced with certainty now; hot roads could not dry such eager tongues. Tunes came to their lips again, even though, according to Nath, it was "a land of scorpions and serpents with two heads, whose bite was cured only by snake-amulets that had been anointed with their venom."

The worst stage was between Oboth and Ije-habiram, two weeks of gasping drouth. But in this ruined place the site of an ancient well was discovered and men were set to work. As they excavated, enlarging the mouth of the hole, song sprang up. It was a catch they had used in vintage-time when they trod the grapes to its measures. Fitting new words to the old rhythm, the men emphasized the syllables with downward strokes.

Dig, (*stroke*) dig, (*stroke*) dig, ye sons of slaves. (*stroke*)
Break (*stroke*) earth, (*stroke*) use your picks and staves. (*stroke*)
Dig, (*stroke*) dig, (*stroke*) dig, ye burrowers, dig. (*stroke!*)

In six hours they had found pure water. But they were forbidden to tap the spring until dusk. At sundown, a procession bearing the sacred vessels was led by Aaron and Miriam. The well had been lightly covered with twigs and cloth over which loose earth had been strewn. Aaron placed the ark beside the mound and the congregation prostrated themselves.

The sun, held in the fingers of two lean clouds, slipped between them and fell, as Moses approached from the opposite side.

"Sink, flame. Rise, water," he cried and twitched aside the cloth, unveiling the walled pool. "Spring up, O well," he cried, beckoning above the water, as petals of wind floated down upon it. Addressing the spring a second time, he took one of the brazen vessels and sprinkled three drops of sacred oil over the surface. A third time he commanded, "Spring up, O well," and made a deep ripple with his staff.

This was the signal. Reviving half-forgotten steps, women danced the Dance-of-Rising-Water, holding the right breast with the left hand, while men thumped alternate feet upon the ground, singing:

Spring, spring up, O well.
Sing, sing to us. Tell
How princes have drunk you,
Noblemen sunk you
With scepter and spell.
Bring, clean as a bell,
Your waters that lift.
From the desert a gift.
Spring up, O well!

They danced and drank and danced again. Baptizing themselves in motion, they were washed in increasing tides. There was no division of thought. Time was a river that flowed in and out of them. Measuring eternity, they partook of it.

2

The interval of peace lasted less than a month. The valley of Zared was traversed, the Arnon was crossed, they touched the border of Moab. Sihon, king of the Amorites,

had annexed the strip of territory and sent a delegation forbidding the Israelites to encroach upon it.

"For," said the envoys of Sihon, "we have conquered the lords of high places. There is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon. Beware, then, of the wrath of Chemosh and our king, lest he send Aziru against you. For—"

"Who will be sent against us?" interrupted Moses incredulously.

"The all-conquering general of our forces, Aziru the Amorite."

"Glory over me and praise be to Aton and Adonai!" cried Moses. . . . Moab was blotted out by a summer-house in which two men were examining brick-tablets. The standing figure paced, expostulated, and struck a fist into his palm. Yet the seated figure did not move. He did not argue. But Moses saw what he had not noticed then, that tears were burning the sick man's eyes. Memory tore away from itself and Moses turned on the emissaries in a storm of words whose anger was all they could comprehend.

"Tell Sihon there is time to escape if he leave before the second trumpet. But there must be no hope for the traitor Aziru. Akhnaton has suffered too long in silence. He speaks now. Ride back swiftly, for we follow on your heels. Our coming will be the answer of Israel—and the belated vengeance of Egypt. Ride now!"

It was the bloodiest fighting of the year. Moses rejected Joshua's plan for a delayed series of attacks and hurled the entire army against the walls of Heshbon. The gates were smashed, the defenses crumpled, the streets were a shambles. "Spare no one," Moses ordered, "until the

body of Aziru is taken." His frenzy sent the Israelites, already roused with the foretaste of victory, burning and pillaging through the city. They found Aziru barricaded in one of the villages; the farm-houses were fired, the remnant of his cohort smoked out. His head, still wearing its smile of deceit, was brought to Moses.

"Don't bury it," he said. "It would pollute the dirt. Give it to the dogs of the desert."

The rape continued; the loot was gratifying. Dead men and young women are easily coaxed.

3

Leaving a garrison in Heshbon, Moses gave the kingdom of Sihon to Gad. The rest of the tribes pushed on by way of Bashan. Here they were opposed by the forces of Og and his ring of stone cities. Dibon, the second strongest fortress in Moab, was besieged. It held out for five months, capitulated, was plundered. Three smaller towns were despoiled with greater ease, and, less than a year after the capture of Sihon, the army of the Israelites encamped before Og's own capital of Edrei.

The attackers settled down for a long campaign before the gloomy city. Og's allies, the Amorites, had been disposed of; reënforcements would not be sent from Midian; it would be a war of attrition. Joshua stretched his lines as far as the stony fields of Medeba. Bezaleel and his carpenters made their first battering-rams; the stone-cutters piled up munitions of sharpened trunks and pointed rocks for catapults.

The siege of Edrei is one of the most puzzling episodes

of the invasion. Joshua's record is brief. "Field of Bashan occupied first of Elul. Moses issues last ultimatum to Og. Edrei falls."

The "Book of the Wars of the Lord" is more detailed but scarcely more trustworthy, for it gives the duration of the siege as the proverbial "forty" weeks and interpolates events (such as the conquest of Havoth-Jair) which could only have taken place long after. Various commentators seem to have added conflicting details. But the picture of Og could have been drawn by no one but Nath.

And Og, last of the giants descended from the fallen angels, was King of Bashan and ruled over sixty strong cities. Greatest of the sons of Anak, Og had lived for three thousand years, growing one cubit with every twelvemonth. He had saved himself from the deluge by wading behind Noah's ark; he had escaped starvation by catching whales and roasting them on the sun. As a child he had tripped over Mt. Sinai and had lost a tooth from which the Pharaoh Narmer had made his ivory couch. He had been a familiar of Abraham, had mocked Isaac, and now, as he saw the Israelites approaching, he laughed, saying, "Ho, an army of ants has come out against me."

Moses reached Edrei at dusk and measured its bulwarks. But at dawn its walls towered so high that the whole plain was in shadow. Only when the height began to sway, did Moses realize that it was Og rocking himself on the city wall, his legs on the ground and his head leaning against a mountain.

"Ho, pigmies," cried the monstrous one, picking his teeth with an elephant's tusk, "know ye not that my city is so fortified that it could be defended by gnats? Know ye not that I fatten my geese on larger insects than ye? Run

back to your ant-heap." Moses replied: "Jahveh shall dissipate you as lightly as a cloud in a burning sky."

This enraged Og and he pulled up the mountain which was three miles long, intending to hurl it at the camp of the Israelites which was of the same length. But, since Og had ridiculed the smallest of God's creations, Jahveh sent nine hundred myriads of ants who burrowed through the hill which came down upon his shoulders. Og struggled to free himself of this undesirable necklace, but Jahveh caused tusks to shoot from both sides of his mouth, keeping the burden in place.

Bellowing like a wounded Behemoth, Og charged upon them. But thus weighted, he could advance only twenty yards at a step and Moses, running between his legs, suddenly leaped ten cubits in the air, bringing his battle-ax against the giant's ankle. So great was the blow that the blade cut half-way through, and Og came down with the crash of a thousand trees. But it was not until Moses had bound him with talismanic cords that the giant could be slain.

His blood flowed as far as Egypt, where the inhabitants feared that a new Red Sea was engulfing them. One of his bones was used for a bridge across the Jordan, and, years later, a huntsman pursued a deer two miles inside Og's thigh-bone without reaching the other end. Lest future generations discredit Og's stature, Moses possessed himself of the iron bedstead nine cubits long which had been the giant's cradle.

. . . . . .

"It looks like iron," said Moses. "But what shall we do with it?"

"If it weren't a sarcophagus, that black basalt would

make a handsome doorway," said Aaron. "What else could it be used for?"

"For a sign and a wonder," laughed Joshua. "It's an ancient habit to make mummy-cases larger than the size of its occupant. How otherwise can you impress your descendants? Moab seems to have learned the trick from Egypt."

"But he *was* a tall man," said Aaron.

"And fell like one," added Joshua. "More important than his sarcophagus are his cities. What's to be their disposition?"

Moses pointed to the map. "We must safeguard our rear. This region is a wall of strength. We can keep the principal cities with small garrisons; the rest of the towns will come to terms quickly. Edrei will remain our headquarters for the time. Call in Geuel from Gad. I've promised to consider his tribe's plea for more pastures."

Six months passed occupying the conquered territory. Reuben and Gad, shepherd tribes, found that the district of Jaazer was an excellent place for cattle. Moses gave them the land from Dibon to the fenced towns of Betharan, on condition that they should never cease to be faithful to the other tribes and go to their help whenever called on. Gilead was awarded to the agricultural families of Machir, part of the tribe of Manasseh. Fields of barley grew as wide as the wind. Places were renamed; the inhabitants given their choice of death or slavery. Moab was a happy place for all but the Moabites.

BALAAM

By this time the kings of Moab were thoroughly alarmed. In numbers the invaders were disconcerting enough; the speed of their progress and their capacity for absorption were such that Balak sent a message to his kinsmen in Midian. He wrote:

"They are a restless folk. What they have done to the Amorites does not satisfy them. Already they encroach upon us. If we wait too long, this company will lick up all that are round about, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." In his extremity, he sent messengers to Balaam, the Seer, who was King of Pethor.

Balaam was a man divided against himself. He believed in every lost cause but supported none. He championed the weak and fought on the side of the strong. He was learned in holy writings, adept in forbidden practices. His speech was full of the humility of the east, yet he stopped at nothing to fulfill his ambitions. In the accomplishing of these he was uniformly successful and unhappy; as soon as one aim was satisfied, he turned from it in revolt. He despised conscience and always succumbed to it. Double-minded to himself as well as to the world, he was a diffi-

cult foe and a dangerous ally, an intriguer ready to sell the most guarded secrets. Loyalty and scorn of loyalty waged balanced war within him; he was alternately cynical and superstitious, instigating massacres in the name of righteousness, performing good deeds with the basest intentions. Unable to unite himself, he remained half charlatan, half true prophet, self-deceived and self-destroying.

Balaam received the ambassadors with pompous reluctance. True, the renewed treaties bound him to Balak. Undeniable, too, that these foreigners were a menace and should be driven out. Still he hesitated. His dreams, lately, had been full of portents; twice in the last week, he had stumbled across the threshold. Better, he quoted to himself, a halting step than a nimble funeral.

"But, diviner of the thoughts of Chemosh, god of gods," said the emissaries, bowing three times to the west, "our master, king of the four kingdoms, asks neither weapons nor troops. He knows that mortal armies cannot prevail against the enchanter Moses and that he must oppose the sorceries of Israel with a greater magic. Therefore, our lord sends these gifts to Balaam the Seer, the all-wise King of Pethor, promising ten times their number and further reward if he will blast the enemy with his curse."

Balaam wavered. The endless duel had begun again; his mind espoused both sides with equal determination. He would have to wait for a decision.

He said: "If Balak gave me his house heaped with silver and his granary full of gold, I cannot invoke the powers of middle air without divine sanction. The ground must be prepared, the spirit cleansed of the world. Wait here this night and when the sun is in the central heaven, you will have your answer."

Balaam spent half the night among pentacles, tetragrams, misshapen foetuses, and half the night consulting his chief of statistics. At noon, he spoke to the emissaries.

"Tell Balak I will send troops if they are needed. But first I will summon the aid of Nin-ip and Moloch and Baal-Ammo and Anu-pileser and all the established powers who hate Jahveh, god of the nomads. The cursing will blast him utterly and Balak shall witness his destruction. Let one of your swiftest bear the tidings at once; I will follow, with the princes of Moab."

He rode out with a handful of soothsayers and a chest of thaumaturgical instruments, differing strangely from the panoply of the Moabites. News of the contrast must have reached the invaders' camp, for Nath, recording the incident, niggardly allows him only two servants, and sends Balaam forth saddled on a weather-eaten ass.

It was in a walled vineyard, where grapes hung like misted moon-clusters, that a seraph barred the way. The animal started, though Balaam, seeing only with his eyes, beheld nothing but the road.

And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she thrust herself to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot. And he smote her again, smote her with his whip until the ass fell down under Balaam, whereupon his anger was kindled and he struck her repeatedly with his metal staff.

And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass and she said, "What have I done to thee that thou hast smitten me three times? How have I offended?"

Balaam, thinking his ass had been bewitched by Moses, for it addressed him in pure Hebrew, answered with difficulty, for he despised the tongue, "Because thou hast

mocked me. I would that my staff were a sword, for now would I kill thee."

And the ass, most humble and longsuffering of Jahveh's creatures, moaned and said, "Am I not thine ass upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was foaled unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee? Is thy heart shut as fast as thine eyes?"

With these words, Jahveh cleared the eyes of Balaam and he saw the meaning of the Lord. And Balaam and the ass knelt together, and divination entered him so that henceforth he spoke to men only in the words of Jahveh. And the ass rose to be the pet of the angels, for wings sprouted wherever a blow from the staff had fallen, and his voice became more silvery than the birds of Palestine.

. . . . . .

Balaam still temporized, though he could not tell whether his hesitation was prompted by cowardice or cupidity. The bounty was spread before him.

"And, furthermore, I will add," said Balak, "the greatest of my possessions, which has been the envy of the wonder-workers. It is the bird Yadu'a whose body is virgin gold, whose feet are ivory and whose mouth, fashioned from a male ruby, contains a living tongue. When the tongue is pricked with a needle that has sewn eleven shrouds, Yadu'a opens its mouth and utters oracles."

"I accept," said Balaam, though he could not tell whether his determination was prompted by courage or cupidity. "I will call down a rain of curses to destroy the Israelites without a blow. Plead no longer. I, king and prophet of Pethor, have power over all things, for the words of secret gods are in my mouth." And he gave directions for building seven altars on the highest peak in Moab.

The sky was a broken roof; lances of rain drove through it as the blood of seven oxen and seven rams spilled over the six altars surrounding the seventh. The rain thickened; it grew darker.

"A good omen and a good hour for black magic," said Balaam. The triads had been laid at his feet with a copy of the law of the Hebrews written backward. Balak himself held the jar containing the few drops which a spy had sworn was the true spittle of Moses. Carefully mixing the spittle with dung, Balaam wrapped it in a leaf of the poison-aloe with seven white worms and the splinters of a tree that had been struck by lightning. He placed it on the central altar, sprinkled seven drops of scorpion's excrement upon it and raised his hands to pronounce the sevenfold curse of Merodach.

But the thunder of denunciation died in his throat. The necromancer was lost in the seer; unconsciously the charlatan gave way to the visionary. In a half trance, Balaam cried through a strangled voice, "Balak, the king of Moab has brought me out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse Jacob for me and come, defy Israel."

The accents cleared on a rising note. "How shall I curse whom the gods have not cursed? How shall I defy whom the lord of earth hath not defied? Lo, this people shall dwell alone; they shall not be reckoned among other nations."

The Moabite princes started; two of them tugged at Balaam's uplifted arms. But he continued in the high voice of prophecy.

"Who can count the dust of Jacob and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Balak shook him. "Are you mad? Have your demons

turned against you? What have you done? I brought you here to curse my enemies—and you praise them!"

Balaam shook a dazed head. He put one hand on the altar to test its reality. The stone was ice to his hot hand.

"The rain has put out the fire," he mumbled. "We must wait for night. There is no power in cold stone. The sacrifice is refused."

Night was hard and dry. Moonlight stretched tautly over the field as the three men ascended to the top of Pisgah. The enchanters had executed widdershins, had marched the victims against the sun, and, in token of the cowardice of their enemy, had flayed a hedgehog, most cowardly of running things.

"Like has power over like," droned Balaam, placing upon the altar a crescent cut from the bone of an embryo and a broken fingernail. The rag-tree had been erected and on this, Balaam hung a strip of wool stolen from the body of a dead Israelite. At the foot of the tree he placed five nasik cubes, the square of squares, and a table that showed the relation between these numbers and the malign stars. He then pierced the wax image of Moses with a rusted pin and dropped it into the flames.

"It is the time for gray magic," said Balaam. "One second every twenty-four hours the god of the Hebrews regrets his creation and, in that instant, loses his power. It is the moment for us. Curses on—" But he gagged. The fit of vision was overcoming him; the words that issued from his lips were not of his shaping.

"Curses on those who curse this people whom their God has blessed. He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob: the Lord is with them, and the shout of a king is among them. A

god brought them out of Egypt; he gave each man the strength of a unicorn."

Balak saw it was useless to stop him now. Besides, there was a taboo against striking madmen.

"Surely," continued Balaam, swaying slightly as his eyeballs rolled up under the lids, "surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel. According to this time it shall be said of Israel, What hath God wrought! Behold, this people shall rise up as a great lion; they shall not lie down until they eat of the prey and drink the blood of the slain."

When the prophecy was finished and Balaam had come to himself, Balak remarked with wry resignation, "We will try once more. But tomorrow, you need not trouble to curse them. Let the gods decide. Spare your strength."

Nath's account of the last conjuration is explicit:

And for the trial of white magic, Balak took Balaam unto the top of Peor, and the altars were of white marble and the young bullocks were whiter than the stone.

And he showed him the camp of the Israelites on one side and the people of Moab on the other, saying, "Behold, the war-stained enemy who plans to destroy these peaceful families who have done them no harm." And Balaam was moved against the children of Jacob and said, "This time I will not seek for enchantments or devices of magic, but I will speak the cursings of my own mouth and send bolts of hate out against them."

But as he gathered the forces of evil into his mind, Moses came and stood within the Holy of Holies, placing two fingers on the ark. And his eye penetrated the tabernacle and the space between them and met the eye of

Balaam. And the eyes spoke to each other. And the light from Moses entered Balaam, filling the smallest vein so that his thoughts stood up in radiance and his mind shone through his face. And lifting a new voice he took up his parable and prophesied:

"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacle, O Israel. They are spread out like pleasant valleys, like gardens by the river's side, like a tree of sweet aloes which the Lord hath planted. Israel is a great wave at flood. He drowned the Amalekites; his seed shall be in many waters, and his kingdom shall be established over many seas."

And Balak, knowing it was the last trial, smote his hands together, rent his garments, and reproached Balaam, saying, "I called thee to curse my enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them these three times. Go back to thy place. I thought to reward thee and give thee great honor, but lo, thy perversity hath kept thee from promotion."

And Balaam answered, saying, "I cannot go beyond my vision to do either good or bad of my own mind. What is placed in my mouth, that must I speak. But before I go back to my own people, let me warn thee. Be wise and attend, for I will advertise what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days."

And with no more magic than the knowledge of the Most High, Balaam fell into a trance with his eyes open and in a voice that was thin and faraway spoke, saying,

"I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh. There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel and shall smite the corners of Moab. And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also shall be his

portion. Strong is the dwelling place of the Kenites, but they shall be dispossessed of their homes and high places. Who shall prevail against the Lord who poureth us out like dregs and scattereth the nations like small dust before the whirlwind!"

And Balaam awoke from his trance as Moses released his eyes, and his natural voice returned to him. And Balaam went back to his people; and Balak also went his way.

. . . . . .

Before they parted at the broad curve of the Arnon, Balaam said, "I have done neither your desires nor mine. It is true that complete destruction cannot befall the Israelites; they cannot be exterminated by wars, persecutions or plagues. But where man has failed, woman might succeed."

"Now that the magic-making is over," said Balak, "I wish you'd stop talking in parables."

Balaam said, "You might achieve a victory over them with the loss of no man's blood. The daughters of Moab are a legend for beauty; the sons of Israel are neither more nor less than flesh. They have eyes that burn, hands that reach out, minds easy to seduce. Let them enter Moab. Open the gates of your cities and the doors of your homes. Make them welcome. Converse with them freely. Let your women grudge no intercourse nor entertainment. If your girls are as accomplished as they are fair, the invaders will come tamely enough to your hearth."

"And then?" said Balak, dubiously.

"Then," said Balaam, "they will, as all men must, try to please their mistresses. They will learn the language of Moab, play its games, ape its customs, worship its gods.

And when they desert Jahveh for Baal-peor, their god will turn from them and they will be powerless."

"And then?" growled Balak, with complete understanding.

"Then," said Balaam, "you will not consult soothsayers. You will put your questions with the sword. There will be only one answer."

THARBIS

1

THREE months after the Israelites had been admitted, Moab celebrated the greatest of her nature-festivals. The dark idols were put away or covered with leaves of ivy; wine-jars stood at open doorways; taboos were discarded; girls walked freely into the moonlight. Every creative thing was extolled in song and act; emblems of fertility were garlanded with happy colors. It was the opposite of Egypt. Instead of severe rituals exalting death, here were frank glorifications of life. Spices burned, flowers were bruised, perfumes provoked and stimulated. No excess of vigor was forbidden.

Moses saw Tharbis as she dropped all but the last long veil. She was dancing the Dance-of-Spring-Planting. In front of her was a bowl in which an upright object had been placed. The scarf that wound about her body was painted to resemble the sacred serpent; her hands darted above it like two agitated heads. Her arms were snakes twining about each other, standing erect, rippling and flexing, striking, relaxing. Moses could not see her face. She stood, immovable but for the sinuous arms, with her back to him.

Slowly the rippling of her arms passed to the ripe shoulders. As the hands fell, sated with motion, the spine began to undulate. A tremor ran through her back, pulsed the length of it, died. Only her buttocks moved, rotating in a languid circle as the scarf loosened and she turned.

Moses saw her now. A young Aethiopian; woman and child, priestess and prostitute. The eyes were half closed, the line of white emphasizing the African skin. Her hair was a nest of coal-colored snakes; the lips lay as if they had been urged apart. Pointed by her hand, one breast was bare, a glory of deep bronze faintly dusted with silver; "like a black pearl," said Nath, "reflecting the moon."

The scarf slipped lower, disclosing a water-soft side, a belly smoother than washed sand. Her body straightened. The arms began again, molding the air, holding it gently away, pressing it to her. Her palms shaped a head, fingers played among unseen hair, the left hand rounded an invisible thigh. There was a convulsive movement of her breasts and the scarf fell from her, coiling in a little wind about her ankles. There was no sound but the small hand-cymbals and the hard breathing of the onlookers.

The arms hung. Nothing moved now but the belly, circling and twisting in a slow ecstasy. The musicians had ceased when the scarf unveiled her. Now as the naked hips swayed, a small drum was patted, pronouncing the tension. The belly rose and fell, quickened the rhythm, paused, prolonged the moment, was held still. The whole body shuddered and Tharbis sank among her veils.

A blood-stained mantle, laced with sunlight, was thrown over the naked girl as thirteen temple-harlots carried her to a mound and, joined by an equal number of young priests, imitated the ritual. The ceremonies grew in dis-

order and simplicity. There was no more thought of law or discrimination. The Israelites joined. No excess of vigor was forbidden.

2

Cozbi, daughter of a Moabitish chief, stretched her neat legs impatiently, repolishing a scarlet fingernail.

"Aren't you ever coming to bed, Zimri?" she pouted.

"Just another minute, darling," replied the son of Salu, prince of Simeon. "There's only one more sentence."

"And what keeps that too-occupied head from the breast of his beloved?" asked Cozbi, rubbing a ball of scent under her arm-pits.

"The usual thing. Translations for your father and the weekly report of Simeon for Aaron."

"You'll ruin your sweet brow with wrinkles. Why don't you give up those stupid reports?" urged Cozbi. "You really aren't afraid of Aaron, are you?"

"Not Aaron, sweetheart. But there's Jahveh."

"What does he care? Didn't you and I celebrate the Union of the Two Principles? Don't half the tribes sacrifice to Baal-peor? And does anything happen to them?"

"I know, but—"

"Confess, Zimri, my love, it isn't so terrible to lie on a soft couch instead of the earth. It isn't so bad, is it, to give up sour goat's milk and have spiced wine at your elbow? Tell me if you've ever tasted anything sweeter than roast pigling or a stew of turtles?"

"But, darling—"

"I know just what you're going to say, old wiseacre. I know all about your laws and your conscience, and I wouldn't have you unhappy for a moment. But you're not

so vain as to believe that yours are the only customs that are good. What's proper in one country or one circumstance isn't always fitting in another, is it? We have a right to our happiness; I don't know of a better reason for existence. Suppose you do transgress once in a while? Laws were made by men; they can be broken by men. Doesn't the end justify the means? Look at the other young men. For that matter, look at your leader."

"I don't see how he could have done it."

"Don't be narrow-minded, darling. Moses hasn't lived with his wife for years. Besides, he married Tharbis according to Aethiopian standards."

"But she's black!"

"Now, dearest, don't let your prejudices run away with you. Tharbis mayn't be as yellow as your Israelitish girls, nor," she added, surveying her small flanks, "as fat. But she's a clever girl, even though she is a bit promiscuous—I mean, publicly, of course."

Zimri shook his head. "If she weren't a princess of Cush, Moses would—"

"You men! How you love to romanticize. You'd be like lost children without your fairy-tales. It mayn't be true that Tharbis was the fatherless daughter of a camp-follower, or that she was instructed in the ceremonies of the black Isis at the age of nine, or that she has forgotten which of her eight cousins was her first lover, and I refuse to listen to the story of what she did in the tombs at Chittim, and I'm sure the rumor about her idiot children isn't wholly true. Still, she's no more of a princess than I am. Much less," said Cozbi, taking a gold brooch from the love-knot and spreading her hair on the pillow.

Zimri put aside his scroll and sat down at the foot of the couch, fingering her ankle with an abstraction not altogether comforting to his companion.

"I'm not saying—"

But she wriggled away. "You're all alike. Always ready to criticize and censure. What right has Aaron to judge? Aaron should be the last one to complain with a grandson by the name of Phinehas—that's just bad Egyptian for Pi-nehasi, the Negro. You Israelites and your talk of pure blood!"

"But listen, dearest—"

"I've *been* listening. I try to be patient. But you always take such an unreasonable attitude. You know as well as I do that just because Aaron doesn't care for certain things, he'd like everybody else to give up their pleasures. Why should they suit his caprice? Each person must do what is best for him. And, if it's good for him, it doesn't matter what any one else thinks. I wouldn't be here, would I, if I thought we were doing something we shouldn't. In your own heart you know it, dear. Yet, somehow, you always put me in the wrong. It's as if you wanted me to be ashamed of myself. If I didn't love you so much—" The tears came alarmingly.

Zimri slid over the couch. "Let's not wrangle," he said, bending down.

"I don't want to," said Cozbi, in a suddenly broken voice. "I'd much rather not. But when you say such things and I'm so full of love for you—"

She put up her mouth. Its argument was conclusive.

3

THARBIS was tamed; Moses saw the wild thing turn to a tired sleep. It had not exhausted him; he was keen and aware. Pride of strength was even greater than his delight. Flesh, cast down for years, rose in mastery. Nothing could dispute it, not even Moses.

The moonlight was a blue tissue over Tharbis; a child for all her abandon, thought Moses, watching her breathe as quietly as a babe. The mouth, now that he looked close, had grown heavy, the brows were overcast, the whole face was darkening unpleasantly. A shadow, thought Moses, a cloud before the moon. Possibly the tent flap had blown to. He got up to investigate the shadow. It was Aaron.

"I'm sorry, Moses. But tomorrow morning it may be too late."

The shadow was now over Moses.

"Can't you manage things for a few weeks without me?"

"It's a rumor from Midian."

"I don't want to hear it. Not now."

"I tell you, Moses, tomorrow it may be too late."

"Rumors, rumors, rumors. Whispering—that's all I hear."

Aaron swallowed, turned to go, then decided to have it out.

"Possibly that's because you stay where only whispers will reach you."

"Who frames such thoughts?"

"I do—and Miriam, also."

"May she be struck with leprosy. And if you, Aaron, dispute my authority—"

"I'm not disputing it. I want you to use it. The camp

is going to pieces without it. We've been here four months —not a few weeks—and the camp is full of strange gods. It was bad enough at the beginning when the hangers-on mixed themselves up with Moab. But when the heads of the people—"

"That is their own doing. Am I to blame for it?"

"If you want the truth, yes. They wouldn't have dared without an incentive. This—marriage of yours—"

"I don't feel called on to defend it. I'm tired of this talk about the strange woman. All women are strange. You presume—"

"I didn't come here to argue; I came here to warn you."

"That's impudence! Take care of yourself and your soft priests, Aaron. I can take care of myself. I've never been surer of power."

"But the messengers—"

Aaron got no further. The tent-flap whipped and closed.

4

The messengers reported a popular uprising. Half their force had been stoned by townsmen on the borders of Midian; the other half had escaped with minor casualties. Impossible to say whether the violent act was spontaneous or whether it had been planned by the governors of the city. They had heard rumors in Petra that Balaam was in conference with the five kings and that, in the event of further trouble, every Israelite in the country would be put to the sword.

Further trouble followed in less than a week. Phinehas, Aaron's fanatic son, organized a religious crusade. His

first act was the murder of Cozbi and her paramour. Waiting till midnight, he entered the tent, surprised the lovers and pierced both bodies with a javelin. Pinning them naked to the ground, he fired the tent, calling to the armed Levites, "Do likewise. Baal must be destroyed." The riot lasted till dawn. Bodies were dragged before profane altars, idols were overthrown, the face of Baal-peor was smeared with cattle-dung.

The five kings of Midian waited no longer; they declared themselves in a united proclamation to their people. "Midian was endangered by the Hebrews, the refuse of the desert. Midian had been too hospitable to these ingrates who wormed their way into the heart of a country only to drink its blood. Midian would not suffer the same fate as Sihon and Bashan and its neighbor, Moab. Midian would take the offensive. Midian would march against the godless criminals at once."

As a preliminary, every Israelite and all those bearing Hebrew names or in any way related to the tribes were sacrificed to Baal-Nebo, god of war. Among the first victims were Zipporah and her two sons.

5

The tragedy was kept from Moses until every detail had been verified. As the Midianites advanced, Aaron refused to give Joshua sole responsibility and Moses continued to live in his dream. There was only one way to rouse him.

The suddenness saved him. Moses listened without understanding; his mind refused to accept anything more than the shock. The camp was crowded with noise of moving masses, but he stood in emptiness. Aaron's words were

no more comforting, no more intelligible than the grinding of wheels. Day rounded itself in light, but he was held in a sphere of darkness: a black hollow, expanding to a universe, converging to a pinpoint, a black nothingness spinning about a hideous center—the black body of Tharbis. How white the hands of Zipporah had been, how white the pure calm of her being. And his boys—

Suddenly Moses realized he would never see them again. Space crumpled. He seemed to be dropping into infinite depths. Bottomless revulsion, endless hate of himself, of the world, of Tharbis. . . . Tharbis. . . . The falling stopped with a smash.

"Cleanse the camp," he cried in a ram's-horn voice. "Purge it of all who incited to whoredom."

"All?" said Aaron eagerly.

"Spare no one. And call Joshua. Midian's turn has come. We march against Petra tonight."

"And shall we—?" began Aaron.

"For God's sake, ask me no more questions," said Moses, with a distracted cry. "Set your men to work."

The Levites were given arms. They needed no instructions. Aaron's priests were thorough.

AFTERMATH

1

Midian was easy prey. Its soldiers had been idle too long; its mercenaries, rumored to be ferocious swordsmen, proved more effective on the parade-ground than on the battlefield. The temper of the people was anti-militarist; slackness in the towns had grown to a virtue. Delivery of arms and foodstuffs was hampered by corruption and bad roads. The five kings quarreled among themselves.

But, though a solid front might have delayed the Israelite hordes, it could not have stopped them. Joshua had selected a thousand of the toughest from each tribe and the twelve thousand swept down the defenses at Petra as though they were old reeds. Rekem, a store-city held by a king of the same name, followed. Evi fell next after a more stubborn siege. Reba, one of the kings, advanced under a flag of truce, hoping to arrange a compromise. Moses would not stop to listen.

"Midian must be blotted out," he commanded with the wild look he had worn for the last two months. "Hate for hate, burning for burning. Let them have both."

Zur was the last king to be taken. He, too, was killed

without further parley. His city, like the others, was fired, its walls thrown down, its gods befouled. Balaam had been found dodging back through the lines. Playing both factions against each other, he had hoped for a long war to exhaust the contending armies, at which time he would bring in fresh troops and crown himself sole King of Midian. His spies had been intercepted and his duplicity exposed; he himself was executed in the four prescribed forms. He was hanged; a fire was kindled beneath the gallows; his heart was pierced; his head was struck off the following day.

Moses towered in the forefront of every action. Joshua set bodyguards about him, but he drove them off.

"I am not so easily destroyed," he said. "God needs me. I am his instrument to torture others beside myself."

The sack showed more than six hundred thousand sheep, seventy thousand beeves, sixty thousand asses, great piles of furniture, vessels of bronze, platters of brass, and no little gold and silver. The captives numbered some eighty thousand. The sight of them burned a fury in Moses. He raged at the officers.

"How often must you be told that I don't want captives! Haven't we enough men to feed? And these women— Why are they alive? Do you want to perpetuate Israel with the children of whores? If there are any virgins among them, let them go free. Spare the mothers. As for the rest—" He made the sign of dismissal.

Thirty-two thousand were liberated. The camp was purified. The loot was cleansed of any associations with its late owners: garments were sprinkled with the waters of separation; furniture was sanctified with priestly blessings; metal was passed through sacred fire. After the

spoils had been equally divided between the soldiers and the congregation, the Levites took their share. "For," wrote Nath in an almost undecipherable scroll, "the captains brought as oblation for the Lord, jewels of gold and ornaments of silver, bracelets and massive chains, necklaces, rings for the fingers and double-rings for the ear, plates and instruments of divers metals. And the priests took the gold of them, even all wrought jewels. Moses alone would take nothing, but picked up a handful of dust saying, 'It will keep.' And none could interpret his parable."

2

Dialog lagged in the tent of Aaron.

"Granted that the Levites are a tribe apart," said Joshua, "I'm afraid that the others won't relish the institution of separate cities. The asylums of refuge are another matter. Of course the priests should have their lands, and, as representatives of Jahveh, they are entitled— Aaron, you're not listening. You haven't been since Moses left the conference."

Aaron knitted his fingers. "I can't attend to anything properly while Moses is like this. It was natural that his mind should be unhinged when he first heard of it. But that was five months ago and, instead of improving, he's grown worse. I used to be worried about his sudden rages, but these long fits of silence frighten me more. You must have noticed how he sat here without saying a word and how he got up, feeling his way out, as though he were blind or asleep."

"Yes, I noticed. It's the reaction. Just after the shock, he was too stunned to feel. He's suffering the after-effects. It will pass."

"That's what I've been hoping. But he grows more and more moody. He talks to no one for days, and, when he does speak, he says queer, disjointed things. Yesterday, when he'd been away from the camp all afternoon, I asked where he'd been. He said, 'Trying to find the mountain of my inheritance.' And you know there isn't a mountain within thirty miles."

"That's just a phase of grief, Aaron. The wound is still raw. But time's a great healer."

The old man shook his head. "I can't forget the way he acted when Miriam died," he persisted. "Refused to go to the funeral and then appeared with ashes all over him just as she was being buried. 'A long comfort,' he cried and scattered some over her. 'The dust of Miriam is one with the dust of Zipporah. Earth is content and ash is fortunate; it needs nothing but ash.' Queer words for such a time."

"Don't dwell on them," said Joshua. "Let's trust Moses to come to himself. Meanwhile, let's not stop our own work. Now, the first of these six protective cities—"

3

So, Moses thought, man has been walking since time's origin. So, in darkness and loneliness, between a dream and a dream. Foot after unwilling foot, from unsure beginnings to no certain end. Dark and alone. Crying wordlessly. Lifting his questions to an overcrowded universe, to a god too occupied to listen. Dark and alone. And lost.

The desolation was unbearable; the strain of silence too great for one man. No one could understand it, except one whose silence was greater than his own. If he could tell

him he would have peace. He must find Akhnaton. Now. Delay no longer . . . He walked faster.

The sky was reddening; the far hills were the texture of smoke. Moses, watching the east, began to make his mind assemble itself. There had been a fire, he remembered, and waves of people had broken over him. A fire—how could he have forgotten?—in the palace, and Ay had warned him not to go further. Poor Ay was getting old. How could a few embers hurt him? Besides, his companion was waiting, had been expecting him for a long while.

He found Akhnaton just as he had pictured it, in the small summerhouse with the two broken tiles. Nothing had changed. The Nile lapped its tongue over pebbles; lotuses opened their fragrant bosoms. Akhnaton's chin drooped, he pressed his temples in the old way, but his face had lost its weariness.

"You've had a hard time getting here," said Akhnaton.

" 'Nophis," Moses began, but could get no further. He did not care to, knowing that nothing was required. All need of questioning was gone. He was content to gaze at the all-wise, never-to-be-forgotten features until time stopped.

"Yes," said Moses finally, "it's been a long way. But I've come."

Everything was clear. Everything except the look of 'Nophis which kept changing its years as an object under flowing water changes its form. Now it was the look of the sad Pharaoh; now it was the face of the boy who had played truant with him among the grapes.

"You've been expecting me?" Moses asked, after the ripples of light had calmed.

"I knew you were coming. Have you forgotten I said

you must use power before you could discard it? I knew you would have to lead, to satisfy the ruler in you until you tired of making laws and watching men break them."

"I am tired, 'Nophis."

"And the sword?"

"Is its own destruction. You were right. The sword praises nothing, not even God. There is no faith in it. It is a confession of our unbelief."

"You have come a long way, indeed."

"So much has happened, 'Nophis, so much that bewilders. I have fallen so low."

"You will rise higher than ever, higher than Sinai."

"You were with me there. I felt it."

"I have never left you; nothing can separate us."

"Through you I came to know God; through you I am still learning. For a while I forgot him in worshiping myself. But that's past. I may love him less than when I was a child, but I know him better."

"And has that knowledge brought you happiness?"

"No," said Moses, as though repeating a lesson. "It has made me more than happy; it has made me whole."

"You are healed," said Akhnaton, whose face grew in power. His body was dissolving, the arms were trailers of cloud, but the head filled half the heavens. "You are whole," he repeated becoming less and less substantial. Moses could no longer see his features because of the great shining.

"Don't go," prayed Moses as a child might pray. "Don't leave me alone."

"You are not alone. I am always with you wherever you go. My hand will be in yours; our voices one voice. Do not be afraid. Look up. Look into my face and remember."

They found Moses staring into the sun.

WHERE THERE IS NOTHING

1

"And so," said Aaron, "we learn what we are. And, in the same way, people learn the law."

The terebinth silvered its blunt leaves with stars, holding the two men in a cool thickness. Moses, who had been listening, was silent. Silent and sure. Night called him, with intimate home-coming, to a self he had loved, feared, escaped, but which never until now had been his self. Finally he spoke:

"They are learning more than that, Aaron; they are coming to terms with that half-helping, always opposing thing we call life."

"Life?" echoed the other. "What is it but restlessness and disorder? People running up and down the earth, scratching the earth, filling it up, scratching over it again. Regretting the past, belittling the present, distrusting the future. A shapeless thing. Shapeless—except for law. Law holds it up and gives it form, strengthens it with purpose."

"That is what I used to think," said Moses. "But we defeat it with our own egotism. We see ourselves as law-

givers. Then, drunk with legislation, we pile up commandments until they topple of their own weight. Look how our mandates increase. We began with ten simple statements—and, by the latest count, there are now over six hundred. What's worse, three hundred and sixty-five of them are prohibitions. Three hundred and sixty-five! Thou-shalt-nots of the flimsiest and most pernicious sort. Thou shalt not round the corners of the beard; thou shalt not show mercy to the heathen; thou shalt not loosen the breastplate from the ephod or tear the upper garment; thou shalt not permit a priest's daughter to eat sanctified food if she marries a stranger; thou shalt not save an idolater from drowning; thou shalt not attend a feast without an offering; thou shalt not change the order regarding the wave-offering, nor the firstfruits, nor the tithes. Thou shalt not . . . Thou shalt not . . . No wonder the people rush from laws that forbid everything, to a lawlessness that denies nothing."

"But the original few were just as hard to enforce. The first ten—"

"Erred in the same way. They voiced the fears which your priests extended into a code."

"Fears?"

"Doubt, distrust, sin-hunting. Law looking askance at life. One commandment feebly saying yes to nine fixed negations. How can we hope for obedience to such laws? How can we respect ourselves, much less our God, without affirming?"

"Affirming what?

"Our decency. Emphasizing our power for good, not our capacity for evil."

"But you wouldn't destroy the structure you've built up?"

"I can't. Another will. I haven't advanced far enough. But I won't need to. I can trust the spirit of man. God's man. It is for him that the last of the ten was written. That, alone, is beyond legality. To be without greed or envy; to affirm God in the dark chamber where none but the soul can judge. Every act of man is regulated by legislation. Here, alone, his thoughts, his secret intentions are recalled to his own scrutiny, to self-government which is the government of God."

Aaron's expression grew more and more incredulous.

"And you believe all laws could be covered by that single law?"

"That—or one other. And some day even that will be superfluous. Aaron, can't you believe in a time when it will not be necessary to make strictures, when men will formulate their own liberty with instinctive cleanness? A time when men will require no more directions than a tree, obedient to the central laws of being?"

"Frankly, I can't. Can you?"

"I can, possibly because I've broken every word as completely as I smashed the tablets when I came down from Sinai."

"Surely, Moses, you're not going to turn a moment of anger into a symbol—or a philosophy?"

"I'm doing neither; I'm recalling history. Thou shalt not kill—and I have murdered once with my own hands, a thousand times with my armies. Thou shalt not steal—and I watched while we robbed the Egyptians. Thou shalt not commit adultery—and nothing could save me from it. Honor thy father and thy mother—and I cursed them

both when I learned who I was. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain—and Korah was right, knowing how often I used high-reaching words to serve my pride. Thou shalt not covet—and there has been little that I did not desire up to the throne of Egypt. Thou shalt have no other gods before me—and, though I tried to put God first, my own fulfillment was my idol. It all went. Once I had the world to wear on my finger; now there is left nothing for flesh to celebrate. Nothing. But where there is nothing, there is God."

Except for the sentries and a child's teething-cry, the camp slept. Aaron's brow darkened. He spoke slowly.

"I do not understand that. I thought you were opposed to negation. How, then, can God exist in it?"

Moses was a distant voice.

"His existence nullifies it, fills it."

"You mean there can be no void?"

"In the spiritual sense, no. God—or an Idea—invades emptiness and permeates it. The mind cannot conceive blankness without filling it, if only with itself. Everything else is a lie. In the end there is nothing but the spirit that refutes denial, that gives hopelessness power to survive, that strengthens the very will to disbelieve."

"But this is—I don't know what. I do know, it's a conception that can comfort no man. You can't substitute a paradox for the reality of God."

"It isn't a paradox, Aaron, it's the essence. Do you think your reality—your self-contradictory, revengeful Jahveh, always losing his temper, quick to rail and reverse his position—do you think such a god more comforting?"

"He is, at least, more human. For our purpose, a god

that forbids and punishes is better than one who lets humanity flounder in ignorance. It's too bewildering. We will always demand a god who is direct—and just."

"Just? You call Jahveh just? A god of rape and massacre, a tribal god jealous of his neighbors, greedy for praise, childish in resentment? A god of ceremony and sacrifices, who promises only material rewards and confines these to a single people—a god no more godly than Dagon or Bel! If that is your just god, give me Amen."

"But would you have one god for all the world?"

"Can the Lord of the universe be less? Less than father and mother? Less than a god with clean hands? No. The only wise god refuses to acknowledge evil, checks violence with the thought of peace, affirms himself in man—and never ceases affirming."

"And you would have that happen to a multitude of half-free strugglers, still bound by habits of fear?"

"It is happening now. Happening in spite of them—or us. In spite of laws which limit instead of enlarge man's liberty of conscience. But freedom will come, though it will be brought by other messengers: singers, wanderers who walk earth but live in no worldly kingdom, men carrying torches no wind of change can blow out, makers of music, inspired peasants, carpenters, uncrowned kings—all imagining their dream so intensely that it will rise and triumph."

"In the flesh?"

"Why not? Can man imagine anything, desire anything, without creating it? Is there a want he cannot fulfill? Man will project every dream of man until its shape is as solid as he. Dominion and power over all things are his, and there is no limit to the sources he will liberate."

"In Canaan?"

"In Canaan, and ten thousand years after. Now, if he only willed it. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile," interrupted Aaron, yawning, "they have the law and that's better than nothing."

"Especially," added Moses, unperturbed, "since nothing is the one thing that does not exist."

2

It was the end of war. Moses established a truce with Midian, solidified peace with Moab. The tribe of Reuben extended its fields; cities were rebuilt and replenished. Ataroth was garlanded with fruit orchards; the painted walls of Nimrah formed a gayly colored necklace; the booths of Sebam were a succession of perfumes. Baal-Meon and Nebo, which had suffered little demolition, were left unchanged except for altering their idol-celebrating names.

Nebo, sheltered by the mountains of Abarim, became the headquarters while the camp reorganized. Here a light epidemic of dysentery troubled the multitude. But the duration was short; few succumbed to it except the weak and old. Aaron, approaching seventy, was one of these.

And when Moses saw Aaron's end approaching, he lifted strong prayers to prevent the oncoming of Samael who is girt with death, whose shape is anger, and whose sword is kept sharpened by the cruelties of men.

But Samael did not turn back. Momentarily stopped by the power of Moses' pleading, he put two clouds over his ears and came on more swiftly. Then Moses appealed to the elements for aid. Understanding their speech and ges-

tures since birth, he put by commands and approached them as a kinsman.

He went first to Earth, imploring, "Mother of all, help your children. Hide Aaron away that the eyes of Samael may not discover him." But Earth replied: "How can I deceive the angel of the Lord? Death is appointed and I am powerless, for it is written that Earth, like Aaron, must wax old and void. Earth and its children must be one in the end, for it is written, Dust unto dust until earth return to itself."

Moses then invoked Air, saying, "Impede Samael's progress. Blow his wings apart; thicken yourself so he can find no passage through you; thin out your substance so that he plunge through space further than his fallen angels." But Air replied, "I have no power against the Eternal Messenger, for it is written, The Air is not clean in his sight. Nor can I make the heavens grow solid, for it is written, The heavens shall blow and curl away like smoke."

Then Moses besought the aid of Fire, saying, "Extend yourself in roads of flame, confusing Samael till he know not which way to go. Beat against his heart's blaze. Throw the whole body of heat against his hot soul. Let Death die." But Fire answered, "Can smoke fight against its own life? When water kindles water and the sun engenders ice, flame will extinguish flame. For it is written, The life of man is as a crackling of twigs. There shall be brief burning and a long ash."

Moses ran to Sun and Moon, crying, "You are near the throne; you stand at His right hand and His left hand. Intercede for Aaron." But, circling about Moses, they whispered, "Alas, before we pray God for Aaron, we must

pray for ourselves. For it is written, On that day the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed."

Then Moses hastened to the Mountains, requesting them with a troubled voice. "Have we not shared each other's silences? In Horeb and Sinai did we not dwell close to one another's hearts? Will you not rise up now in a great wall over which Samael cannot leap?" But the heights shook their heads, replying, "What can we, who are transitory as man, do for man? Is it not written, The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed?"

Moses then raised his voice to the Stars, calling, "Heavenly Ones, fly in the face of Samael. Sting his eyes; scatter like sand beneath his feet; burn holes in his wings; blow him about in a fiery rain." But the stars remained fixed, replying, "We are bound to our stations. Until the word comes, we dare not release ourselves from time. For it is written, The planets shall be steadfast till the host of heaven be dissolved."

At last Moses came to Water and said, "Friend of man, prove your friendship now. Whip yourselves up; hurl your waterspouts against Samael. Make your floods stand upright; throw your cataracts over him. Tell your tides to spring at him. Let your oceans drown his hissing." But Water washed its cold hands and chuckled, "Moses, what ails you today? Are you not the man who ordered me about, and beat me with a rod, and divided me from myself, and shamed me by letting thousands walk boldly through my secret channels? Did you not lift your staff and make me work underground, and force me to issue through rock? What has occurred to you that you should expect help from me?" Moses placated Water, saying, "Then I was a king and I commanded; now I stand

before you as a suppliant." But Water ran off with a bubbling mockery and the sea drew back from his feet.

And when Moses returned, he saw the angel Samael about to leave earth. And the body of Samael was a red comet, and the feathers of his wings were a myriad small flames. And the face of Samael was blinding peace. And the hands of Samael carried the soul of Aaron.

PROMISED LAND

Little was seen of Moses during the next year. After Aaron's death, the popular voice and Moses agreed on a successor. Joshua hesitated to accept the honor, but Moses overruled his objections, saying, "He that watches over the fig tree shall eat of its fruit. You have been commander of the army; there is not much more to learn. We will govern together; you will soon observe that men are only soldiers without swords. They need captains no less."

Joshua found himself called upon to make decisions more and more frequently. Once the routine was established, Moses rarely appeared at councils. It was ambiguously rumored that he was in retirement because of a mysterious and lingering disease, that he was communing privately with Jahveh, that he was perfecting secret plans for a sudden descent on Canaan, that he was forming new statutes for a new land. Traders saw him miles from the camp, alone, rooted for hours. Twice he was mistaken for a tree-trunk; twice he disappeared for a month. Nath wrote:

And Joshua sat upon the judgment seat and governed

the people. Moses, himself, served him for forty days as a disciple serves his master. He arose at midnight, taking his own shirt, from which he carefully shook the dust, and laid it on a seat near the sleeping Joshua. He then cleaned Joshua's shoes and, as Moses touched them, the cracked sandals changed into slippers of golden leather. Then he brought his best under-garment, his bead-work cloak made from the magically preserved remnants of Joseph's many-colored coat, his linen turban that had been manufactured by the wizard Balaam and had the property of resisting sharpest steel, his crown of pearls which had been presented to him by the Red Sea. Examining these treasures to see if all were in good order, he washed and polished them, arranged them on a golden chair, and crept out noiselessly as a sleeping thought. In the morning, Joshua, beholding the shining array, imagined he was still asleep. He put on the royal vestments as in a dream, and woke only when he discovered Moses before his door, crying, "Behold, the co-ruler of Israel. Awake, rejoice, proclaim! Exult and shout, hills of the earth; sing, ye tents of Jacob; open your mouth, O heaven of heavens. For a new King is come among the fathers of kings."

And all the people praised Moses and feared Joshua.

Moses was waiting for him in the acacia meadows.

"I wanted to walk with you alone," he said, as Joshua approached and the two instinctively started toward the mount of Pisgah.

They began the gradual ascent without words. Neither made a demand upon the other's mood; silence was a common consent. Not until they stopped at the half-way ridge did Moses speak.

"You will be surprised at what I am going to say, but

let me talk and you will understand." Speech in itself had become so rare a thing from Moses that Joshua was sufficiently surprised. He nodded and Moses went on.

"Ever since my breakdown in Midian, I've been thinking of this. It's taken me almost a year to come to the decision, although I knew it was inevitable six months ago. Your efficient management of the people—"

"Guided and shared by you."

"Let's not pretend, Joshua. There's been little sharing. From now on, you must assume sole command in name as well as act. The men are restless; they strain to push forward again. It is time for them to go on."

"But why should that make any difference in their conductors? How should you enter Canaan except at the head of the nation you have formed?"

"That is what I am trying to tell you, Joshua. I am not going to enter Canaan."

"Not going—?"

"No. Canaan is the promised land as long as it remains a promise. As a country, it will be much like any other. There will be digging to do and hard trading; too many mouths to feed and too many tongues eager to advise. Men will continue to imagine liberty as a refusal to obey; freedom will only make them freer to abuse their governors. They will talk daily revolution, and their rebellion will rouse nothing except a dust of words. The confusion within will be louder than the enemies without."

"Yet we must possess Canaan."

"*You* must. I see my own youth in you, Joshua, and it speaks in the same voice. But age and suffering have given me a greater concern. Yes, you and the people must possess Canaan if only to learn that one land is like another. But I have a more constant occupation—I have my soul

to possess. And so I will remain behind, for the soul can possess nothing."

"But you can't! Remain behind? Alone? It's impossible. And is possession a crime?"

"Not a crime, Joshua, an obstacle. It has taken me a lifetime to discover that, though I heard it as a young man in a conversation not unlike ours. But no one can teach us. We can learn only what we already know. By ourselves we can achieve nothing. And possession is only another effort to extend the power of these little selves. Possession is the worst of tyrants, for it binds us to the object. We are servants to the Thing; we become the slave of what our slaves create for us. Without possessions we are rich and free. We can identify ourselves with disembodied power, share impersonal beauty, come into an understanding where every man is a comrade and every hour is a communion. In that world there can be no antagonisms, for we have become part of everything in it; we are everybody. And so I do not need Canaan. I will remain here."

His tone discouraged further argument, his determined rising precluded it. They continued the ascent. Nearing the top, the two paused again. After they had unlatched their sandals, Joshua spoke:

"But can man live without possessing? Can he be free of hunger and the claims of the body? Can he build without passion, love without hate, do good to one without harming another?"

"Not yet, possibly. But, in the end, all effort may be one. Nothing is lost. Hate cannot persist; it returns to the hater. Passion destroys itself. Life shakes off destruction with every new leaf and uses death to grow on."

"But you talk in terms of the millennium, Moses. Of a

perfect future and a perfect man. Where do you see a sign of it?"

Afternoon was beginning to loose its longest shadows. One pointed itself at their feet.

"Look at that hill, Joshua, calm in outline, rooted in security. Nothing can disturb its balance or composure. Is there less perfection in man than in a mountain?"

"But surely, Moses, a human being is greater. A living man is not a mass of unresponsive rock. And if you mean he should rise to such heights, I could answer that he surpasses them, being the peak of creation."

"What makes you think so, Joshua?"

"A hundred things, things of everyday. His power to experiment, to change, to impose his will on the elements, to tame wild earth and animals—" He paused, searching for a climax, then triumphantly, "To make laws."

"And that is man's power? That is only the power to subjugate. True power does not wait for man to debase it; it upholds itself continually in the very things he cuts down. The rose-tree has power: power to use the air to publish its scent; to call insects without a sound and summon bees to carry its life from rose to rose. It can even arrest man, make him dream and, though he may not know it, praise his creator."

"But a plant is—just a plant. It can cause others to dream and build, but it can erect nothing beyond itself. It may move insects and men, but it cannot move an inch to meet them."

"No? You know how we are nourished, but you ignore the chemistry of light and dust. The rose eats and drinks and builds hedges that will endure longer than our walls. Which do you think will survive—the tallest tower of

Egypt or the slow-creeping grass? And if motion is the final word, the tree moves through space as well as man; though it moves upward while man, less ambitious, moves sideways. And if man's restless wanderings take him greater distances, the tree has a longer time to grow toward the sun."

He got up to his feet.

"Sometimes, when I see how briar and ivy run here and there, so humanly anxious to cover the ground, I think that trees could walk about did they wish to, but have given up that folly long ago."

They lifted each other over the last ridge. The summit was terraced; its peak stood out like an observatory. They looked down.

Jordan was a silver vine beneath them, outlining the border of Canaan. Jericho raised its proud head like a challenge; beyond, Palestine spread its fourfold width. Here the low hills of Galilee shadowed Lake Gennesareth whose paved water seemed stone for a sure foot. Here was the bank of Judea and there were the ball-topped heights of Ebal and Gerizim. Lebanon and the snow-peak Hermon shone faintly to the north and east. Through a chink in the wall of mountains, a finger of light touched Bethlehem.

"It is ours," said Joshua, persuasively. "We must claim our inheritance, mustn't we?"

"Yes."

"And isn't it yours?"

"Yes."

"Why talk, then, of staying behind? If you won't come for your own sake, come for ours. We need you."

"No, Joshua, you don't. I know it better than you. It is another reason for my refusing Canaan. In spite of withdrawal, I am still regarded as the people's leader;

worse, I am their intimidation. They no longer wish to stone me with their hands, they fear me in their hearts. Therefore they fear the God they think is my invention—and run from him. Miracles, laws, punishments are not enough to hold them to him. They turn from every protection to throw themselves before Arabian idols, to imitate every barbarism known to Moab and Phoenicia. When that protection is removed they will, by their very perversity, implore it. I do not want them to cherish me—I want them to find God, even if every calamity must happen before they seek him."

"But you showed God to them in a hundred ways."

"No. I imposed him on them. United them in false reverence, drove them to their knees through fear. It was a failure, and deserved to be. Fear was bound to estrange them from true worship, for it is a denial; it is the opposite of faith. In Canaan, I will no longer be their goad. They will drive themselves—or you."

"I'll risk it," said Joshua dryly. "But come, anyway. Come and see it happen—all that you planned: the nation that you prepared in the wilderness, the warriors you shaped out of frightened clay."

"I can see it better from here. I will have my vision undisturbed by multitudes suffering and resenting the will of one man, undisturbed by self-glory and self-reproach."

"But what will you do here? How will you live?"

"Much and fully, Joshua. There are thoughts to explore, questions to propound. You need time to answer them. And the certainty of the answers is always waiting within you. Come, let us go back to the camp."

"But Canaan," urged Joshua, in a last plea as they prepared to descend the ledge, "the Promised Land—"

"That, also, is within you. Come, let's go this way."

VALEDICTORY

Daybreak was a tumult of banners. Trumpets and ram's horns outcried each other for an hour. But the camp needed no rousing. The last legislation had been received a fortnight ago; this morning had been set for departure; no one had slept as late as dawn.

"Canaan!" cried the women, nesting pans and stuffing pots with children's undergarments and nondescript rags. "Canaan!" the soldiers nodded to each other, polishing buckles and fastening last-minute thongs to new sandals. "Canaan! Canaan! We're all going to Canaan!" danced the children, making a sing-song game of it. "Canaan!" said the Levites to the passers-by, as though they were pronouncing a blessing. "Canaan!" whispered the incredulous old men to whom the word was a synonym for tomorrow. "Canaan!"

Three hours later everything was in readiness. The order to march beat from Joshua's headquarters and twelve cymbals buzzed it to the furthest tents. Moses was waiting for them on a small elevation of Pisgah, facing the ruined Temple of Baal-peor. They marched, singing

the song of triumph, each tribe adding its verse of victory and self-congratulation.

Moses, Moses, made us a law.
(*He was a king in Jeshurun.*)
We looked where we liked and we took what we saw.
Marching, marching to Canaan.

The mountain roared and hearts began to knock;
(*There was no peace in Jeshurun.*)
But Moses found us a home in the rock.
Marching, marching to Canaan.

Where shall we run and where shall we hide?
(*Fear runs fast in Jeshurun.*)
The sea opened wide and we walked inside.
Marching, marching to Canaan.

Moses, Moses, gave the command,
(*He was a king in Jeshurun.*)
"Cross over Jordan to the promised land."
Marching, marching to Canaan.

As the chorus waned with repetition, the tribes interpolated their own chants with steadier insistence. The men of Reuben sang:

Reuben, Reuben is written on the sky;
(*Glory, glory to Reuben.*)
His words shall be deeds and his men shall not die.
Marching, marching to Canaan.

Judah made itself heard above the rhythm accented by feet and wheels:

When you fear to go and it's worse to delay
(*And there is no help in Jeshurun*),
Judah, Judah, will find you the way,
Marching, marching to Canaan.

Levi, bearing the paraphernalia of the Tabernacle, was heard next:

When the heavens part and you faint in awe
(*Bless thou the Lord in Jeshurun*),
Levi, Levi, will give you the Law.
Marching, marching to Canaan.

Then the house of Joseph, with its military divisions of Ephraim and Manasseh, leaders in every war, struck up:

The enemy waits where the enemy wills;
(*High stone walls in Jeshurun.*)
But Joseph's children shall break down the hills.
Marching, marching to Canaan.

And so to Gad and Naphtali, until the last man of Benjamin had shouted himself hoarse. Then the trumpets spoke again; drums halted. They had come to Pisgah, to receive farewell and blessing.

Moses stood on the very spot that a tablet had consecrated to Nebo, the Babylonian god of prophecy. Joshua was the only one who noticed the coincidence, as Moses, without lifting arm or voice, began his valedictory.

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is One God. And you shall love that God with all your heart, and with all your

soul, and with all your might. And let the words which I tell you today be held in your heart's heart."

Moses summed up the chief events of the wanderings since Succoth, repeated the statutes of the covenant, exhorted his hearers not merely to learn the letter but to recognize the spirit.

"You have been rebellious from the day that I knew you. But I did not see your stubbornness nor your sins; I saw you in your perfection, worthy of your inheritance. So you must try to see yourselves."

The men on the outskirts of the crowd began shuffling.

"I got that about our being rebellious," said Heth of Zebulun to his tent-mate. "But what was the rest of it about?"

"Blessed if I know," replied the other.

"You were not chosen because you were more in number than others, for you were the fewest of peoples. You succeeded because God loved what was godlike in you. Hold to your faith; for by faith alone we passed dry-shod through the sea, by faith you were fed with a food neither you nor your fathers ever tasted. Do not forget how manna answered your prayers and you were shown that we do not live only by bread, but by every word that falls from God's mouth and is translated into the bounties of earth."

The restlessness increased, though Moses was oblivious to it. Joshua, who never could be shaken, put a trembling hand on the shoulder of his youngest captain.

"Remember those days and call heaven and earth to witness. Singers to come will publish the name of the Lord. His doctrine shall drop as the rain, as the small rain upon the tender herb. For he alone took you through the waste

howling wilderness, made you ride on the high places of earth, let you suck honey out of the rock and oil out of the flint. Remember to call on him when you cross Jordan and go into nations greater than yourselves, when you confront cities fenced like Jericho, walled up to heaven—"

"*Ho! Let us worry about the walls. We've seen higher than Jericho—eh?*"

"*Sure. They'll fall in a breath—if we only blow hard enough.*"

"—and when you come into your kingdom, you must exercise every virtue; be more and more merciful. For a charge is on you. Care not only for your own kind but for the stranger; respect the outcast as you were once outcast. Cherish the fatherless. Even the Egyptian must not be abhorred."

"*Even the Egyptians? What's happened to the old man?*"

"*He's wandering.*"

"You have your God. Love him, but do not blaspheme the gods of others. All prayers rank the same; all worship is one. And let none take what belongs to strange temples. Theft is theft, even though a Levite commit it in the name of God. Remember the poor. When you reap the corn, leave the gleanings. More than that, when cutting down your harvest, if you forget a sheaf or two, do not go back for it; the widow and the fatherless will be fed. So with your olive trees. When you have shaken them, do not beat the boughs again; let some of the fruit remain. Invite the needy to share your surplus—more, press them to take the good things with which God has blessed you. Remember, you were bondsmen in Egypt, and be generous with your harvests—"

"*Wait till we get 'em—eh?*"

"*We'll wait forever at this rate.*"

"—and remember your fellow-laborers who work for you without complaining. Raise up the ass fallen in the road; he is a creature of God no less than you. As with your dumb helpers, so with the helpless. Show the roads to any who have lost the way; it should not be counted a charity but your privilege. Extend your mercy to the trees. When you besiege a city do not cut down the orchards for spears or battering rams, for the tree of the field is man's life. And when—"

"*Get on with it, old man.*"

"*Yes, we've got other things to do.*"

"—here you stand, all of you, captains of the tribes, elders, officers, all the men of Israel, your wives, your little ones, strangers in the camp. The way is simple; keep it and you will prosper in struggle and in peace, in the fruit of your body and the fruit of your land. For the commandment I give you today is not hidden or far off. It is not in the heavens, so that you wait for some one to climb the sky and bring it down to you. It is not beyond the sea, so that you may excuse yourselves by saying, Who shall go over chartless water to fetch the truth? The word is very near. It is in your mouth even while you ask; it is the beat in your heart, shaping your mind. Knowing it, you know God, and can choose between life and death, between—"

Scraping of soles increased. Joshua sighed, looking over his shoulder. "If they would only listen! If they could carry this moment into Canaan—! This is the living word."

"Yes," said the young captain. "They would—if they knew it. But—"

"—neither deal falsely, nor lie to one another. Do not judge unrighteously. Better still, do not judge. Live without hate—hate is unfulfilled murder. Cast it out of your heart. Do not seek vengeance. Love your neighbor as yourself."

"Well, of all the mad—!" grumbled Heth of Zebulun.

"It's a good thing he's not coming along. Imagine that for a battle-cry in Canaan!"

"—and so, take my blessing with you."

A sound, like the slipping of sand, escaped from the men tired of doing nothing but shifting feet. They knelt. Each tribe in turn received benediction and raised its banner. The end was in sight.

"Reuben is blessed. His name shall live; his deeds shall not die. . . . Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people. Let his hands be sufficient for him. . . . Levi is thy ward, O Eternal. He said, Who is my mother and my father? He neglected his brothers, cleaving only to thee. . . . Benjamin shall be beloved and dwell in safety. The Lord shall cover him and he shall dwell between his shoulders. . . . Joseph's land shall be blessed with precious things brought by the sun and precious things put forth by the moon. . . . Zebulun shall rejoice coming in and going out. . . . Issachar shall exult in his tents. . . . Simeon's strength shall be a wonder in the mouths of captains. . . . Blessed be he that enlarges Gad. He shall dwell as a crowned lion. . . . Dan is a lion's whelp, he shall leap with one leap from Bashan. . . . Naphtali shall be satisfied with favor; he shall possess north and south. . . . Asher is blessed with children. Let

him dip his foot in oil; he shall never tire . . . And blessings on all. Your numbers shall lessen, but you shall never die. As your days, so shall your strength increase."

They rose with a great shout. It had been hot standing so long in the sun; kneeling in the dust had choked them. Jordan would be cool.

Moses had not quite finished, though his last words were lost in the rattle of departure.

"—no sustenance but one. No refuge but the eternal God. And underneath are the everlasting arms."

"On to Canaan," they cried as the carts rumbled and the sun pushed against their shoulders. "On to Canaan!"

They did not look back.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THIS work makes few pretensions to biographical accuracy. Authorities differ radically concerning Moses in Egypt. An eminent scholar (Alan Gardiner) suggests that Moses was none other than the Pharaoh Amōsis, who, warring against the Semitic invaders, was adopted as a legendary hero by the Hebrews. Another *savant* holds that Moses could never have led the Israelites since he existed only as a renegade priest in Heliopolis.

Because of such contradictory conclusions, and since the chronologies of the Old Testament as well as the Egyptian identifications have been a source of endless controversies, I claim the right to place Moses in the troubled times of Akhnaton, "the first individual in history."

Although historical authenticity is disclaimed, I must record my indebtedness to various documentary sources. Besides the "Antiquities" of Josephus and the invaluable works of Maspero, I have been greatly assisted by James Henry Breasted's *A History of the Egyptian People,* and the same authority's volumes containing the comprehensive *Ancient Records of Egypt,* Arthur Weigall's essay *Tutankhamen: The Historical Problems,* A. H. Sayce's *Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotus,* Kurt Sethe's pamphlets collected in *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Aegyptens,*

The Tell El-Amarna Tablets in the British Museum, E. A. Wallis Budge's *The Book of the Kings of Egypt,* Ad. Erman's *Die aegyptische Religion,* and Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews.* The Hymn of Akhnaton, with its curious similarities to the 104th Psalm, is an adaptation of Professor Breasted's original translation.

The borrowings from the Bible are too obvious to require enumeration.

L. U.

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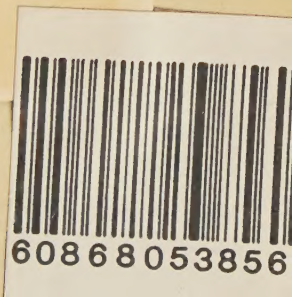

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